

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again! Volume 1

Milli-gram

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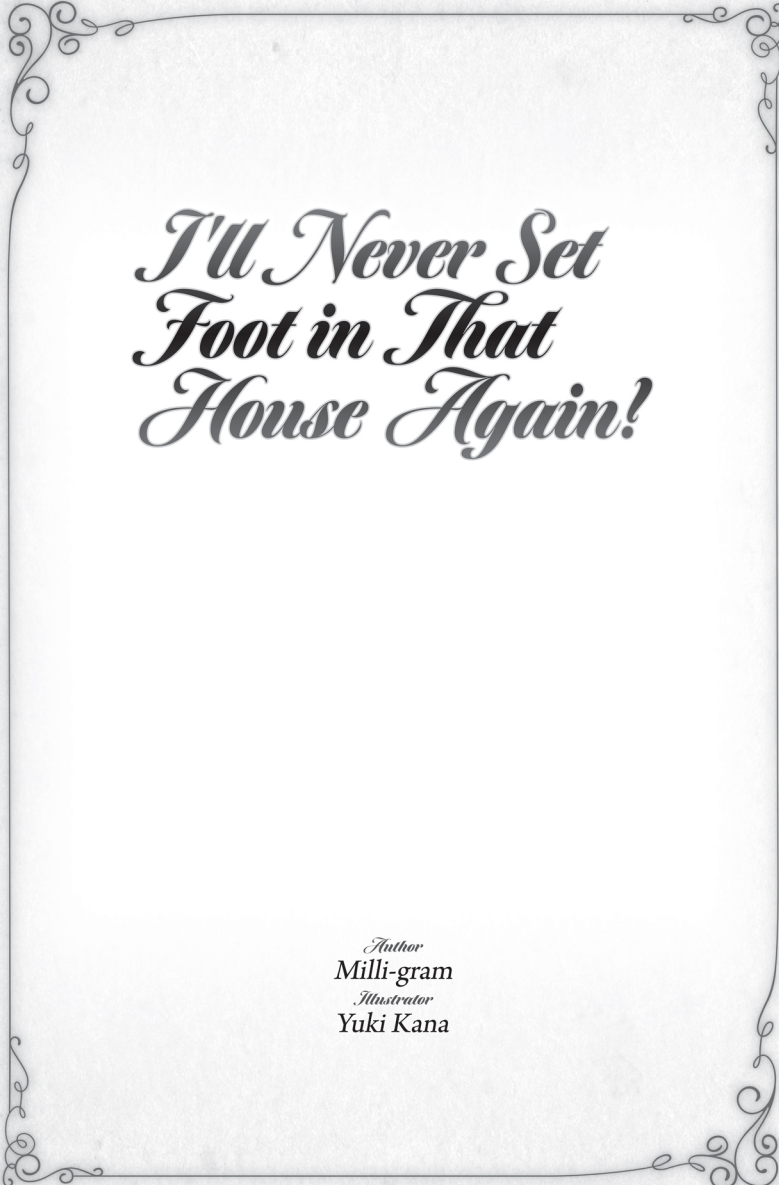
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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

Prologue

My name is Chelsea. I'm the elder twin daughter of Baron Eucharis, and I'm called a failure.

In the pitch dark of the morning, before the sun arose, I got out of my crude bed. I put on my tattered old clothes, and exited the run-down shed on the outskirts of the manor. Making sure not to make a sound, I got to cleaning the manor.

I would think that the daughters of lesser noble families would help clean, but my family wasn't that poor. The other members of my family had personal maids who took care of them, and even their own chefs. They wore nice clothing, ate delicious-looking food, and had fun.

Why was it that even though we were all family, I was the only one wearing rags, being starved, and made to clean?

Once, I tried asking my mother, and she gave me a twisted smile before responding, "You're an ugly failure, unfit for the house of Eucharis. You'll never get married off to anyone, so I'm having you learn how to be a maid early. You didn't even know that? I'm going to have to get even stricter with you."

Ever since then, I had been told to call my mother "Lady Medisina" and my younger sister "Lady Margaret." I also began getting whipped as punishment for the slightest mistake. In addition, it had been years since I'd seen my father. He was frequently away on work, only returning every so often. Even when he was home, Lady Medisina would order me to stay in my shed, so we never saw each other.

Since the manor had been built in a period when my family was very wealthy, there were a lot of rooms. It always took me until near noon, when the sun was high in the sky, to finish cleaning them all. After finally finishing my cleaning, I headed straight for the kitchen. Because I'd been working since before dawn without anything to eat, my stomach was growling loudly. But though the chef was there in the kitchen, he shook his head at me.

Lady Medisina had ordered the chefs not to make me any food. They used to make me a little something in secret, but I was punished when she found out. The chefs couldn't bear to see me being punished alone, so they stopped making me food altogether. Instead, they would give me anything that was left over. That way, they wouldn't

be making things for me, so I wouldn't be punished.

What the head shake meant was that there were no leftovers today, which meant I wouldn't eat at all. *Haah... I'm so hungry...* Sighing to myself, I drank water until my stomach was full and left the kitchen.

"Eww, what are *you* doing in here!?"

As I walked through the halls, I heard a hysterical shriek from in front of me. It was my younger sister, Lady Margaret. She was staring at me like I was garbage.

Lady Margaret had inherited Lady Medisina's slightly curled fiery red hair and eyes. Her skin was pure white, with not a scratch on it. She had told me that people likened her eyes to rubies. But in comparison as her elder twin sister, my hair was originally pale pink, but just looked grey through all the filth and grime. My eyes were big, buggy, and purple, while my skin was rough and covered in bruises, cuts, and scars from the whip. I was also a full head shorter than her.

Lady Medisina's personal maid and chef had told me that twins were supposed to look similar. Lady Margaret and I were twins, but we looked nothing alike. Why? Were we really twins? I wanted to ask, but I was too afraid of the whip to let myself.

"Oh, you're right. What is this hideous failure of a baron's daughter doing here?" Lady Medisina walked out into the hall, seemingly after hearing Lady Margaret's voice.

I immediately moved to the edge of the hallway, kneeling on the floor. I was never allowed to look up at Lady Medisina. If our eyes met, I would be whipped.

"Ah, that's it. You, weed the garden. My lovely little Margaret and I will be in the sunroom studying manners," she told me, before heading there with Lady Margaret. She seemed to be in a good mood today, because I wasn't whipped. I was honestly relieved.

I felt worse and worse as I peeked up at their backs. According to the maids, chefs, and the old gardener, I wasn't as ugly or useless as Lady Medisina said. But my sister Lady Margaret was treated like a proper noble, while I was worked like a maid.

Why just me? I knew that if I asked again, I'd just get whipped without getting an answer.

Biting my lip to stop myself from crying, I headed to the garden. The weeds were out of control. There had been an old gardener up until last year, but he died during an epidemic. He'd taught me lots of things that he said I'd need to know to survive.

Using the same scythe he'd used, I started carefully cutting the weeds near the gate. As I eventually reached near the entry hall, I heard footsteps and hid behind some bushes. It seemed that we had guests. There was a woman in a white robe with a blue stole, and a

man wearing the same robe with the hood up. There were also four knights, each with a short yellow cape on one shoulder. They were heading from the gate towards the hall.

The hooded man stopped in his tracks, looking towards the bushes where I was hiding.

“Garbage like you should never dirty the eyes of guests.” Lady Medisina had always told me that. I knew from experience that I’d get whipped even worse than usual if I was seen.

I squeezed my eyes shut, clutching my hands in front of my chest in prayer. *Please, don’t see me...* As I prayed, I heard a woman’s voice, and fading footsteps. Opening my eyes, I could see that the hooded man wasn’t looking my way anymore.

The group made it to the door, while I breathed a relieved sigh. The woman adjusted her robes before knocking on the door.

The knock was immediately answered by Lady Medisina’s personal maid, “May I ask who you are?”

“We’ve been sent by the Royal Research Institute as per the Lady’s request.”

“Please wait one moment while I confirm with Lady Eucharis.” The maid headed back into the manor before appearing a moment later with Lady Medisina.

“Oh, we’ve been expecting you! Please, come in,” she beckoned the guests inside, plastering her best smile on her face.

What did they mean by “her request?” I wanted to know, but I couldn’t go inside. I just kept on weeding, since I’d be whipped for slacking off otherwise.

Finished with around the entrance, I moved towards the manor itself. Since the guests would probably be brought to the parlor in the east wing, I decided I could probably work unseen if I started by the sunroom in the western wing.

But just as I started on the weeds near the sunroom, I saw the guests moving. Wondering why they were going to the sunroom instead, I quickly hid behind another bush.

I managed to conceal myself, but I could hear everything they said from my hiding spot. If I was found, I’d definitely be whipped for eavesdropping. But since I couldn’t hide anywhere else now, I just tried to stay as small as possible.

“Thank you all so much for coming all this way from the capital. I am Medisina, the wife of Baron Eucharis,” Lady Medisina introduced herself. You could tell from her voice that she was nervous. The guests must have been quite high in rank. “This is my daughter, Margaret. She just turned twelve.”

“Hello, my name is Margaret, daughter of Baron Eucharis.”

I sighed to myself. It was like there was only one daughter. *Lady*

Margaret is my twin sister, and Lady Medisina is our mother... We're related by blood, but I'm treated as if I don't exist. I could at least give up if she hadn't been my birth mother...

"Congratulations on your twelfth birthday. I am the Aide, Adeline, and this is the nationally-recognized Appraiser, Lord Glen."

I peeked between the leaves to see inside as Lady Adeline gave a proper noble introduction. Following her, Lord Glen just gave a nod, still not lowering his hood. I could see the corner of Lady Medisina's mouth twitch, while Lady Margaret looked very obviously annoyed.

After all the greetings, the four sat down on the sofas, with the knights standing still behind the two guests. Lady Medisina's personal maid nervously began setting out tea and snacks on the table between them. There were six guests in total. *If there are that many, then there might be leftovers after!* My empty stomach gurgled at the thought.

"Allow me to explain things for your daughter," Lady Adeline began, completely ignoring the tea and snacks.

In our world, every person awakened to a special ability known as a Skill at age twelve. There were all sorts of Skills, ranging from useful to useless. The useful ones were divided into four categories—Martial Arts, Magic, Technical, and Unique—before being further divided by five levels. The higher-level the Skill, the harder it would be to control. Without special training, users would run the risk of harming others by unintentional use or rampage.

To avoid such incidents, each child's Skill would be appraised as they came of age, and they would be sent to the Royal Research Institute for special training if necessary. Because nobles usually awakened to higher-level Skills, having their Skills appraised by a nationally-recognized Appraiser was mandatory.

"Now that explanations are out of the way, we'll have you appraised," Lady Adeline said, pulling a thick book and a ledger from her bag before giving Lord Glen a nod.

Giving her a small nod back, Lord Glen tented his fingers, staring straight at Lady Margaret. After a while, he tilted his head slightly, whispering something into Lady Adeline's ear. She nodded, and began flipping through the ledger.

The only sound you could hear was the flipping of the pages. I could see Lady Margaret getting more impatient by the second, while Lady Medisina watched excitedly.

Unable to wait another moment, Lady Margaret leaned forward, asking Lord Glen directly, "Ahem, excuse me! What is my Skill?"

"Your Skill is Upper Level [Fire Magic]. You must go through special training," he answered curtly.

Hearing the results, both Lady Medisina and Lady Margaret's eyes widened in shock, before turning to each other in glee. The reason

why they were so happy was because being sent for special training at the Royal Research Institute was a status symbol for nobles. But while they rejoiced, Lady Adeline furrowed her brows, pointing something out to Lord Glen in the ledger. After waiting for them to calm down, she gave them a blank look.

"It seems that you have another daughter who just turned twelve as well," she said.

The moment the words left her mouth, Lady Medisina and Lady Margaret grimaced at the same time.

"Lord Glen tells me that his Appraisal lists Lady Margaret as the second daughter of Baron Eucharis. We also have records of the existence of an older twin sister who has yet to be Appraised in the Noble Registry," Lady Adeline said, holding out the ledger that she had shown Lord Glen. "Noble births and deaths must be reported within ten days. Any fraudulent information will result in punishment. Has the elder daughter passed away in the last ten days?"

"N-No... My other daughter is very sickly, and cannot leave her room," Lady Medisina replied, shaking her head.

Your other daughter is actually hiding outside the sunroom in the bushes...

"Could it be that you do not realize how much information an Appraiser can see?" Lady Medisina's face went pale at Lady Adeline's cold words.

Did that mean he could see that I wasn't given food or clothing, was being worked like a maid, and also being whipped? Lady Medisina seemed to be thinking the same thing, because she was staring off into the distance.

"Where is your other daughter?"

"...It's out weeding the garden," Lady Medisina replied, looking away.

Lord Glen stood up, exiting the sunroom through the door to the garden, while Lady Adeline and the knights followed. It seemed that Lady Margaret was tagging along too.

They're gonna find me... I didn't have a chance to run. Lord Glen walked straight towards the bush where I was hiding, stopping right in front of it.

"I know you're hiding in there. You can come out," he said in a gentle voice.

I was told never to be seen because I'd dirty guest's eyes, so I couldn't come out. If I did, I'd get whipped badly. My hands and feet would be bound, and I'd get hit in the spots where it hurt most. It'd keep going, no matter how much I cried or screamed, and I wouldn't be able to move the next day. I never wanted that to happen again.

I was scared. I hugged my knees close to my chest, shaking.

“It’s okay. Come on out.” His voice was even gentler this time, but I was too terrified to move.

But then, he pulled his hood down, so I could see his face from between the leaves. He was smiling softly, more beautifully than anything I’d ever seen. His hair was dark as the night sky, and his eyes were so blue they sucked you in. His features made him seem like an angel from a storybook.

“...Pretty.” The word left my mouth before I could stop it.



While I sat still, just staring, Lord Glen slipped his hands under my arms and lifted me from the bush before putting me back on the ground. Then, he put a hand on my head, whispering, "...Clean."

Suddenly, my body was shining. The filth coating every bit of me dripped off onto the ground, disappearing.

"That was magic to make you all clean. Since it isn't a Skill, anyone with mana can use it if they practice enough," Lord Glen explained when I tilted my head in confusion.

Holding my hand out in front of me, I saw that while I was still covered in cuts and bruises, I was clean. My hair had even gone back to its true light pink color.

"Thank you..." I murmured as I bowed. He patted me on the head in response.

That might be the first time anyone has ever patted my head!

While I stood there blinking in shock, Lady Adeline came over to me, kneeling so we were eye-to-eye. Why did she look like she was about to cry?

"May I ask what your name is?"

I could hear the tears in her voice, so she might have cried already.

"I'm Chelsea." Since I didn't know how to respond like a noble, I just lowered my head, like the old gardener used to.

After looking between me and the Noble Registry in her arms, Lady Adeline gave Lord Glen a nod.

"I'm Glen, a nationally-recognized Appraiser. I'm just going to check out your Skill, okay?"

After giving me a kind explanation, Lord Glen stared at a spot just above my head. *Is that where his Appraisal showed up?*

"Chelsea's Skill is [Seed Creation]. She can create any seed she wishes for."

Lady Adeline's eyes went wide when she heard the Skill name as she opened the thick book and looked through it. After a while, she shook her head. "It isn't in the Skill Dictionary."

"Didn't think so." Lord Glen nodded.

"Yes, it seems to be a new Skill."

Kneeling down like Lady Adeline, Lord Glen took my hand. "Please, would you allow us to examine and research your Skill at the Royal Research Institute, for the sake of our country?"

At a loss for words, I just nodded.

"I can't believe this!" The moment Lady Adeline closed the Skill Dictionary with a thump, Lady Margaret screeched, rushing at me. "Garbage like you shouldn't be allowed to attend the Royal Research Institute!"

I flinched as she raised her hand, closing my eyes as I waited for impact, but...it never came. When I opened my eyes, I saw that Lord Glen had caught her by the wrist.

“Are you saying that I, a nationally-recognized Appraiser, am lying?” His quiet voice seemed to echo through the garden.

Frowning, Lady Margaret took her eyes off me, turning towards Lord Glen. But instead of complaining more, she looked shocked. It seemed she was just as surprised by his appearance as I was.

“Oh, Lord Glen, you’re so handsome...” Lady Margaret covered her cheeks with her hands, glancing back at him. Rather than surprised, she might have been in love. Sighing, Lord Glen let go of her wrist.

“P-Please excuse Chelsea’s carelessness...” Lady Medisina finally hobbled out towards us, apologizing.

“Chelsea didn’t do anything. It was your other daughter,” said Lord Glen with another sigh.

“Margaret?” Confused, Lady Medisina looked between Lady Margaret and me.

“Chelsea will also need to go to the Royal Research Institute, so make preparations.”

“Her too...!?” she screeched, baffled.

And so, both Lady Margaret and I were instructed to go to the Royal Research Institute in the capital. I’d never left the manor grounds before in my life. All I knew was what I could see from the garden. The old gardener told me that the capital was where the King lived. It was a place where all the roads were paved for the carriages, with lots of streetlights and stores... He said that it was bright, bustling, and fun!

I couldn’t believe that useless trash like me could ever go there! While part of me was excited, the rest of me was scared. *I might still be whipped for mistakes there. I hope it’s at least better than here at the Eucharis manor...*

1. My First Carriage Ride

The next morning, a pair of carriages had been sent to the Eucharis manor for us. Two four-seated carriages, painted in ways I'd never seen before.

Lord Glen and Lady Adeline were there, and with Lady Margaret, me, and the four knights, that made eight. I thought that was why they needed two carriages, but apparently, the knights were riding on horseback to guard us. That meant that two people would be boarding each carriage.

Why not just take one, then? When I tilted my head in confusion, Glen gently patted my hair.

"We've got luggage, after all," he said with a smile.

While all I had was a small bag with a change of underwear, Lady Margaret brought two large bags, prepared by Lady Medisina.

I nodded understandingly, and Lord Glen pet my head again.

"Chelsea gets to ride with me," he announced, gently pushing me inside the carriage.

"Why does that good-for-nothing get to ride with Lord Glen!?" I could hear Lady Margaret shrieking from outside. Lady Adeline and the knights frowned, but stayed silent.

When everything was loaded onto the carriages, we set off.

Lord Glen's hair sparkled in the light coming through the small carriage window. *He is so pretty—just like an angel.* While I was thinking that, our eyes met.

"What's wrong?" he gently questioned me. I quickly looked down, shaking my head. It was rude to look at people. If he'd been Lady Medisina, I'd be whipped. Just the thought had me shaking.

"Oh, that's right. Have you eaten?"

I shook my head no. I'd gotten up at the same time as usual, and had been cleaning right until the carriages came. Nothing had been made for me, and even if it had, I wouldn't have had time to eat it.

Lord Glen sighed, mumbling, "Emaciation, Inhibited Growth, Psychological Trauma, Lacerations, Bruises... You're just full of status ailments. Since I can't use [Cure] too obviously, I'll just get rid of the Emaciation first."

I tilted my head, not understanding what he said.

"Cure her emaciation — [Cure]."

The moment he whispered it, I was surrounded by a faint light. I

felt like I was lighter. *What was that?* I thought. Lord Glen smiled softly at my confusion.

“That was [Cure], a healing Skill. If you ate while you were emaciated, you’d just end up throwing up any solid...normal food you tried to eat. Keep it a secret, okay?”

I didn’t quite understand, but I knew not to talk about it, so I nodded. Then, Lord Glen pulled out a paper bag, handing it to me.

“I had this made for you, since I didn’t think you’d have had breakfast. You’re hungry, aren’t you?”

I could tell what it was! There was food inside the bag!

I swallowed hard as I took the bag from him. Opening it, there was an egg sandwich inside. *I’m drooling... Can I eat it?*

“You can eat it,” he said with another gentle smile, apparently hearing my unvoiced question. Saying a simple thanks to the earth god, I bit into the sandwich. The sweetness of the egg spread through my mouth. It only took half of one side of the sandwich for my stomach to be full. I wanted to eat more, but I just couldn’t.

“What’s wrong? Are you full?”

I nodded at his question.

“You can eat the rest later. I’ll hold it for you until then.”

Oh, that’s right! I never thanked him!

“Thank you...” I quickly blurted out.

He pulled out another bag, handing that to me too. Opening it, I saw a simple cream-colored dress inside. *What’s this for?* I tilted my head again, confused.

“That’s a change of clothes for you. Would you be able to put it on when we stop to give the horses a break?”

The clothes I was wearing were rags full of holes. He must mean that I have to wear proper clothes, since I’m going to the Royal Research Institute.

“Thank you...” I just kept bowing to him.

A while later, we stopped for a break. Since Lord Glen stepped out for a moment, I took the chance to change. The silky dress was a bit big, but the material it was made of was nice. I slipped my old clothes inside my small bag.

Afterwards, I stepped out of the carriage, only to meet eyes with Lady Margaret. She looked shocked for a moment, before coming up close.

“What are *you* doing in such nice clothes!?”

“Um, Lord Glen...”

“And JUST you!? That’s not fair!”

When I tried to explain that Lord Glen had just taken pity on me, she cut me off, turning and walking over to him. I let out a long sigh. I was always so nervous when talking to Lady Margaret, even though

she was my younger sister. I don't remember when it started. One of the knights saw me sigh, and looked down at me worriedly.

"You gave my sister nice clothes, so you must have some for me as well, right? Where are you hiding them?" she asked Lord Glen with a smile.

Our mother, Lady Medisina, and Marquis Ackroyd always gave her whatever she wanted. Marquis Ackroyd was Lady Medisina's father, which would make him our grandfather. But I was never allowed to call him that. Just like I was told to call my mother and sister "Lady," I was always told to call him "Marquis Ackroyd." He would always get Lady Margaret anything that her heart desired. Toys, clothes, shoes, accessories... Anything. Lord Glen would definitely do the same.

"That was just for Chelsea. I have nothing for you," Lord Glen said with a shake of his head.

"...That doesn't make sense! *I* should be getting those kinds of presents, not that trash!"

Lady Margaret complained and fussed, but all Lord Glen did was sigh, staying silent. He didn't do what she asked.

I was shocked to learn that not everything went as Lady Margaret willed.

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The carriages rolled through the capital's gate before sunset.

"The capital of the Kingdom of Chronowize is walled, and then the royal castle is walled even further. They call that a 'citadel.'"

Looking out the little carriage window, I could see the castle, surrounded by walls.

"Everything within the citadel is the King's. The Royal Research Institute is to the west. Their research covers a lot of different things. That's where they'll be researching your Skill," Lord Glen told me.

When we got a bit closer, they checked our identification. As we neared the castle itself, Lord Glen got out.

"I need to go make a report, so I'll be leaving you here. All you need to do is stay in the carriage until you get to the entrance to the Royal Research Institute. Someone should be there waiting for you."

"Alright. Thank you very much," I said, bowing once again through the small window.

He gave me one last gentle smile before turning and walking towards the castle. His smile really was just as beautiful as an angel's.

From there, the carriage made a few turns before stopping completely. We must have arrived at the Royal Research Institute. Just as I was about to open the door for myself, one of the knights who had been guarding us opened it for me.

Taking care not to trip, I stepped down to the ground, looking up at the buildings before me. The one on the right was large, and the same color as the castle, while the left was built with brown bricks.

“This is the Royal Research Institute!” one of the knights told me with a smile.

A moment later, Lady Margaret’s carriage arrived as well, and she stepped out.

Just as the carriages and knights were leaving, two people came out of the gray building wearing white robes with red stoles. One was a man with brown hair and glasses, while the other was a woman with blue hair and red eyes, who seemed quite strong-willed.

“Welcome to the Royal Research Institute. My name is Mirabel, and this is Tristano. What are your names?” the woman...Lady Mirabel asked with a smile.

“I am Margaret, daughter of Baron Eucharis.”

“I’m Chelsea.”

Lady Margaret introduced herself proudly, while I bowed my head as I said my name. *Why is she being so self-important when she’s only just meeting these people?*

“I’ve heard a little about the both of you. Which one of you is the one whose Skill needs control training?”

“Me!” Lady Margaret announced loudly, looking down at her.

“Oh, so it’s you. I’ll be your instructor. Nice to meet you.”

Lady Mirabel held her right hand out to Lady Margaret, who slapped it away with a scowl.

Why is Lady Margaret looking down at them, slapping away their hands, and just acting so self-important when we’ve only just met them? While I wondered that, Lady Mirabel seemed shocked for a moment before laughing out loud.

“Haha... It seems you need some lessons on manners to go along with your training. This’ll be fun. I’ll show you to the dorm, but the rest is up to you,” she said, turning and walking away.

“Why should I listen to a commoner like you!” Lady Margaret shrieked after her.

That was when Lord Tristano, who had been watching quietly, finally spoke up. “Mirabel is the daughter of an Earl. All of the researchers here are either nobles or royalty. The trainees aren’t researchers, so sometimes there are a couple of commoners mixed in, but since they have strong Skills, they all end up adopted by noble houses. It would be best for you to just assume they’re all high-ranked.”

“You’re kidding! But she didn’t introduce herself with her family name!”

In general, nobles were the only ones with family names. And

according to Lady Medisina, nobles should look down at the masses. But the old gardener told me that nobles couldn't exist without the commoners underneath them. I didn't know who was right, or how I should treat commoners, but if Lady Mirabel was going to be her instructor, I thought that she should treat her with respect, no matter her rank.

"We value achievements over rank here. So none of us use our family names," Lord Tristano said with a wry smile. "You've done it now. She's gonna be extra hard on you."

Lady Margaret's eyes widened at his words.

"What are you doing? Get over here already!" Lady Mirabel beckoned her over from the entrance to the brown brick building. Carrying both of her heavy bags alone, Lady Margaret rushed after her.

As I watched them go, Lord Tristano called out to me, "You must be the one with the newly discovered Skill. Unlike Mirabel, I'm an investigator, or maybe researcher... Just think of me as a helper. You can call me Tris."

Lord Trista—Tris smiled at me, reaching his right hand out. I immediately took it, and we shook hands.

"Um... I'm called a 'failure' at home, so I'd like to apologize in advance for all of the trouble I'll cause you," I bowed deeply after our handshake.

"That's an awful thing to be called... And you're the daughter of a noble too, aren't you, Miss Chelsea? You shouldn't bow your head so much!"

"Huh? But at home, I get whipped if I don't bow..."

"No one's gonna be whipping you here! Let's get you to your room!" He interrupted me in a fluster, before walking slowly to match my pace.

"Oh, so about life here..." As we walked, Lord Tris told me about the Research Institute. "You're gonna get your own maids. We'll also cover your clothes, shoes, food, everything like that. What else... Oh, you'll get paid, too!"

"Huh...?" He was saying so much, I couldn't follow it all.

"We haven't had anyone with a new Skill in the past few decades, so it's super rare! Just know that the Royal Research Academy'll take care of you, so don't worry!"

Seemingly realizing I didn't understand, he summed everything up with a smile.

"Ah, that's right! The meals here are delicious, so that's another thing you can look forward to," he said, pressing his palms to his cheeks and drooling.

"You mean I can eat every day?"

“Every day, three meals, and lots of snacks,” Lord Tris said, with a shocked look.

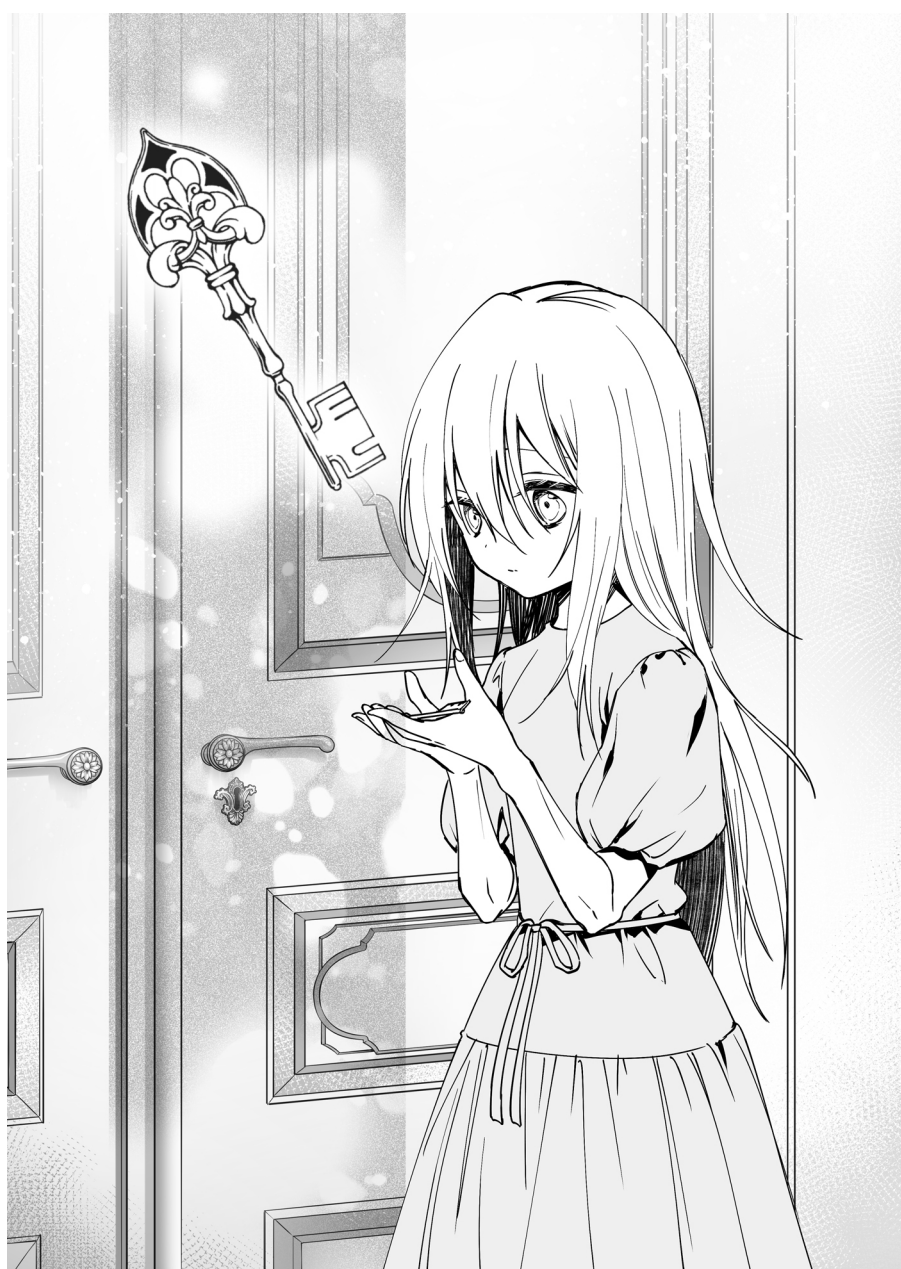
So I can eat every day! This is like a dream! I thought I’d be getting whippings like I did back home, but if I could eat every day, I could handle that!

With hope brimming in my chest, I stepped into the brown-bricked building that they called the lodging house.

Right after entering, we turned to the left, and kept walking for a while before stopping at a door with two women in maid uniforms in front of it. The door itself was painted black, and seemed quite heavy.

“Past this door is your room, Miss Chelsea. I’ll come pick you up tomorrow morning. You can ask your personal maids for details,” Lord Tris said, handing me a golden key on a chain. Then, with a little wave, he headed back the way we came.

I looked down at the key in my hand. It was sparkling, just like treasure would. I could look at it forever...



“Let’s get you inside.” The light brown-haired maid spoke up while I was admiring the key.

I nodded, stepping up to the door. I put the key into the lock, turning it. Then, after slowly pulling it out... The door opened.

“Wow...it’s so big!” It was about four times the size of the sunroom at the Eucharis manor. “I-Is this really my room? Really?”

“This is the room for those who awaken to a newly discovered Skill.”

“It really is your room.”

Both of the maids smiled brightly at my question.

“Now, inside you go,” the dark-brown-haired maid said, gently pushing me forward.

The room was split into five distinct spaces, with a low table and sofa near the door, making a little parlor. A bit farther in, there was a dining area with a table and two chairs. To the right of that was a compact little kitchen. To the left of the dining area were a desk and chair, along with a large, cute, canopied bed to complete the bedroom set. Between the bedroom and the hall was a door, which turned out to be a walk-in closet, filled with dresses, gowns, shoes, and accessories. Lastly, through the door on the farthest left wall was a dressing room, bathroom, and toilet.

“Am I...dreaming?”

There’s no way somewhere as wonderful as this could be my room. I pinched my cheek hard, to try to wake myself up. But it hurt, so it must not be a dream.

The maids, who had been watching me with smiles, lined up in front of me.

“My name is Gina,” the maid with light brown hair braided on one side and slightly droopy eyes introduced herself.

“I’m Martha,” said the other one, whose dark brown hair was in a ponytail. She looked a bit younger and more energetic than Lady Gina.

“My name is Chelsea. I’d like to apologize in advance for any trouble I may cause you,” I said, bowing deeply.

The two maids just blinked at me. *Oh no. I bowed out of habit when Lord Tris just told me not to.*

“I-I’m so sorry!”

Ah, I’m going to get punished... I braced myself for the whip, but all they did was smile at me.

“Lady Gina, Lady Martha, you aren’t cross with me?” I asked nervously.

They both tilted their heads, confused.

“Why would we be cross with you? Ah, but remember that we are

your personal maids. You mustn't address us as 'Lady.'"

"Yes, please just speak to us plainly!"

Having lived my life referring to everyone as "Lord" and "Lady," their response shocked me. It would be far too rude for trash like me to speak so plainly to anyone...

"Um... May, uh... Can I be just a little bit polite?" I asked after a pause, to which they reluctantly agreed.

As I breathed out a sigh of relief, Gina suddenly looked serious, speaking, "We have been told about your situation. Based on that, we will need to teach you about manners, how to act like a noble, and other things a noble must know."

"In simple terms, we'll make you into a proper lady, Lady Chelsea," Martha said with a smile.

I knew that I was no good as I was, so I nodded obediently. Seeing that I agreed, their eyes sparkled excitedly.

"Now, to set you off on the path of a proper lady, we must start with your appearance."

"Which means, off to the bathroom we go!"

"Huh?"

They all but chased me into the bathroom, stripping my dress off.

"W-Wait, I can bathe myself!" I exclaimed. Both of the maids smiled at me as I tried to cover myself in embarrassment.

"No can do, this is your first step on the path to ladyhood. Leave everything to us maids."

"We'll need to get you used to this!"

There was no point in resisting... I gave up, letting them do as they wanted.

Since Lord Glen had used *Clean* on me yesterday, I should have been clean already, but they still washed my hair before rubbing some kind of cream I'd never seen before into it. After letting it sit for a while, they rinsed it, and my hair went from dry to silky. It even smelled nice!

"It's just like magic..." I whispered, only to get another smile from the two maids.

After my hair was finished, they washed me with foamy soap, but it hurt a lot due to the wounds all over my body. Seeing that made both of them frown.

After I was all clean, they shuffled me out of the bathroom with a fluffy towel.

"Normally, we'd give you a massage with beauty cream, but due to your injuries, we'll focus on getting you healed first," said Gina, as Martha rubbed some kind of minty-smelling blue liquid over my body. Apparently, it was ointment.

"We'll need to get a Healer to come use [Cure] on her," I could

hear Gina whisper to Martha.

“You’re right. It’s worse than I had expected.”

After that, they dressed me in soft underwear and a dress made of a smooth material that I’d never seen before from the walk-in closet. I was surprised, since I didn’t think they’d do that much. Next, they led me to the dressing room and sat me before a big mirror. It had been a while since I’d last seen my own reflection, but I really was ugly. My bangs were down to my nose, so I wouldn’t meet anyone’s gaze. I’d cut the back myself, but because Lady Medisina and Lady Margaret would also cut it by force as punishment, it was all different lengths. And my big, buggy purple eyes were creepy.

As Gina was brushing my hair, she stopped suddenly. “Lady Chelsea... Would it be alright if I evened out your hair?”

I knew that I would be out of place here otherwise, so I nodded. That prompted Martha to pull out a cape and scissors. Gina took them, and after fastening the cape around my neck, she got to work cutting the hair on the back of my head. As the scissors snipped, the length of my hair was evened out.

“Please close your eyes so I can do your bangs.”

I obediently shut my eyes, and listened to the snipping. After a while, I felt a soft brush touch my face, cleaning the bits of hair from it, then the cape was removed.

“I’m finished. You can open your eyes now.”

When I opened my eyes again, I saw myself reflected in the mirror, looking different than I ever had been before. My bangs were just below my eyebrows, and the rest of my hair was just long enough to stop between my chin and shoulders. It was a very refreshing haircut. Though my eyes were still buggy, my hair should have been suitable for the Royal Research Institute now.

“Thank you very much,” I said to Gina, taking care not to bow my head too low. She gave me a smile in response.

Leaving the dressing room, I could smell something delicious. I followed the smell to the dining table, and there was warm food ready on the table. Round bread, yellow soup, a colorful vegetable salad, and hamburg steak!? Everything I’d always wanted to try was out at once!

“Please, sit!” Martha urged me to sit down as I stood there, staring.

Looking closely, I realized the chair was a high one, used for children. Being that I’d never been fed properly since I was small, I was very short. It warmed my heart to know that they’d thought of that, just for me. After I sat in the chair, Martha pushed it in for me.

Lord Tris was right, I really do get to eat...!

“I’m allowed to have this, right?” I asked with a big gulp, only to

get a strong nod back from Martha.

After saying thanks to the god of the earth, I went to pick up my fork, only to realize... When the old gardener had been teaching me things, he'd told me that nobles had to watch how they ate. *How do you use cutlery properly!?*

"What's the matter?" Gina asked, seeing me frozen in front of my meal.

"Um...I don't know how to eat properly," I replied as my stomach grumbled loudly. *How embarrassing...*

After thinking for a moment, Gina smiled and said, "Don't worry about that for tonight. We'll begin teaching you table manners from tomorrow on."

Hearing that, I gave her a nod before stabbing the hamburg steak in front of me with my fork. Starving, I bit into it, delighting in the juiciness of the meat. Next, I picked up the bread, biting into it... *It's so soft!* I lifted the soup bowl and drank straight from it... It was pumpkin soup. How long had it been since I'd last had warm soup? The carrot dressing on the salad wasn't sour, so it was delicious, too.

After eating a single bite of everything, my stomach was positively full. *Oh no...* I gulped.

"Is the food not to your liking?" Martha asked, seeing me stop again.

"No, um... I'm full..."

After I said it, Martha covered her mouth with her hand, tearing up. "We had heard about it, but you really hadn't been allowed to eat up until now, had you?"

I nodded.

"Your stomach must have shrunk," Gina added sadly.

"Alright! I'll make sure to ask the chefs to make your meals small, healthy, and yummy!" Martha said, placing the food and cutlery on a cart before wheeling it out of the room.

2. Royal Research Institute

The next morning, I woke up before dawn, as usual. If I didn't hurry up and clean, I'd get another whipping from Lady Medisina. As I slipped out of bed, rubbing my eyes, I realized something.

"Oh... I'm not at the manor anymore," I mumbled, flopping back onto the bed. *I won't be whipped here for not cleaning first thing in the morning, I think.* Apparently. Lord Tris had said that no one here would lay a hand on me, so I should be fine, right?

But since they're letting me stay here, shouldn't I at least do the cleaning? Nodding to myself, I got up again. If I was going to clean, I'd have to get changed first. I decided I would wear the old rags I was in when we first left the manor. After Lord Glen gave me my new dress, I'd put them in the small bag I was carrying as well.

Looking around the room, I didn't see it. *I remember getting undressed before we went into the bathroom, so it should be around here...* Thinking that, I peeked into both the dressing room and the bathroom, but there was nothing. I checked in the walk-in closet too; still nothing. Not that I'd expect it to be in there...

Giving up on my search, I checked the walk-in closet for something else to wear. Unfortunately, they were all so pretty and nice that I couldn't bring myself to dirty them by cleaning. I'd have to give up for now. *I'll ask Gina and Martha about where the bag with my old clothes is later.*

As I sat on the edge of my bed, sighing, I heard a quiet knock on the door.

"Come in," I responded, only for Martha to rush inside.

"I was sent for by the knights outside your door," Martha said, breathing heavily.

The Eucharis Barony wasn't all that wealthy, and I didn't think useless trash like me was of any value other than as a maid... So why would I need knights waiting in front of my door?

When I tilted my head, confused, Martha answered, "The brand-new Skill that you possess has yet to be investigated, Lady Chelsea. It may be useful, or useless, but it could also be used to make money, or for war. Since everything is still unknown, that would make you a very enticing target for people both within our country and outside of it. That is why you will always have knights guarding you."

I see! My mouth dropped open in shock.

“So you needn’t worry about anything, because the knights will protect you. But I was told that they heard sounds from your room. Is anything the matter?”

The fact that I was being guarded had surprised me, but her words brought me back to reality.

“I-I’m so sorry for making noise!”

Since everything I did made a lot of noise, Lady Medisina had always scolded me, telling me to be as quiet as possible... *S-She’s angry with me!* I faced downward, bracing myself.

“It wasn’t loud at all. Can you not sleep?” Martha asked, kneeling in front of me to look me in the eyes. I shook my head no. “It’s still before dawn. It’s much too early to get up.”

“Um... I always get up around now...”

“This early?” she fretted.

I gave her another nod. “Um, I... I would wake up before dawn, and clean the manor. When I woke up at my usual time, I started looking for something to change into that I could wear to clean...”

“So you were looking around your room for a change of clothes...”

I nodded to her once again.

“It seems as if I’ll need to explain things...” Martha murmured with a sigh, placing a hand on her cheek. “You’re a very important person because of your new Skill, Lady Chelsea. You must sleep and eat well so that it can be investigated properly.”

Lord Glen had asked me to participate in the research of my Skill. I knew that I would need to do my best with that, but I didn’t see how that connected to eating and sleeping.

When I tilted my head in confusion, Martha did so in kind.

“Um... I just don’t see how eating and sleeping would affect that...” I said, choosing my words carefully so I wouldn’t make her angry.

She looked at me blankly before replying, “If you don’t get a good night’s sleep, you might get sleepy in the middle of tests, and if you don’t eat properly, you might be too hungry to concentrate on research.”

I see... I nodded again in understanding.

“And cleaning is a job for the special cleaning maids. If you do it for them, they won’t have any work to do! And it should be done while it’s bright. If you do it before dawn, you wouldn’t be able to see well enough to clean.”

So that’s why I always got yelled at for not cleaning properly! I was surprised, but I should have realized this sooner.

“We thought that the clothes in your bag may be important to you, so we sent them off to the laundrymaids. They should be back in a few days.”

The old gardener had given them to me, so their assumption was spot on.

“And listen closely, because this is important. Your personal maids must wake up before you do,” she chided.

That meant... If I got up before dawn, Gina and Martha would have to wake up even earlier than that? Oh no! They wouldn't have time to sleep, then!

Martha smiled as I became flustered. “So you understand, now. If you can't sleep, would you like for me to bring you some hot milk?”

I shook my head, climbing back into bed. “I'll sleep. I'm sorry.”

“It's alright. It was our fault for not explaining properly,” she said, adjusting the duvet covering me. It made me feel kind of nice.

“Have a good sleep,” she said softly before leaving the room.

I fell back asleep soon after.

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It was a little before the eighth morning bell when Martha returned.

“Good morning, Lady Chelsea,” she greeted me.

“Good morning, Martha,” I replied from my spot on the bed, getting a smile in return.

“Let's get you ready.”

Preparations started the moment she said that. My face was washed, hair brushed, and I put on a light green dress. Of course, she helped dress me, just like she did yesterday, so I just kind of froze. The green dress was the type where the skirt would swirl out when you spun around, which I loved. It was so fun that I just kept spinning, until Martha stopped me.

Once I was all dressed and ready, Gina wheeled in a cart carrying breakfast. There was a small piece of bread and warm soup. There was also ham and vegetable salad, both chopped up into small bits. I could tell that it had been prepared while thinking of my small stomach. I felt kind of bad.

The yummy smell made my stomach rumble. I sat down in my child-sized seat, thanked the earth god for the meal, and went to start eating... until Martha stopped me.

“As we mentioned yesterday, we'll begin teaching you noble table manners today. Since it would be difficult to remember them all at once, we'll do it bit by bit. Let's start with how to eat bread and soup.”

Bread was to be eaten by ripping off small, bite-sized pieces, while soup should be eaten with a spoon. There were lots of other rules, but apparently, we were only covering those today. I thought it'd be harder, but both seemed easy to do and remember! I ate slowly, taking care to follow Martha's instructions. Of course, it didn't take long for

me to get full. I thought about forcing myself to eat more, but then stopped, thinking that it would just cause more trouble.

After breakfast, I moved to the sofa in the parlor to wait for Lord Tris.

“I’ve made you some tea, so please drink it while you wait.”

Even though Gina went through the trouble of making me tea, I was so nervous that I didn’t drink a drop. Just before the tenth bell, there was a knock on the door. Gina opened it slightly to see who it was.

“Lord Tristano has come for you,” she said, turning back to me.

I stood up from the couch, heading to the door excitedly. Lord Tris was outside, wearing the same white robe and red stole as yesterday.

“Wow... I almost didn’t recognize you! You look super cute!” he said with a big smile. Martha seemed to be puffing herself up proudly, but I might have been wrong.

“This dress is really cute!” I responded, pinching the skirt and spreading it out for him to see. Martha may have picked it, but it really was cute!

“Ah, uh, I mean, the dress is cute too, but I meant... Anyway, let’s get going.” He scratched his cheek before slowly starting to walk, and I fell in step behind him. Neither Gina nor Martha were coming, so they just smiled as they sent me off.

Stepping into the hallway, I saw the two knights Martha mentioned standing by my door. Both of them had little yellow capes over one shoulder. I gave them a little bow, trying to apologize for causing a ruckus before dawn, and as thanks for protecting me. They didn’t say anything, but both looked surprised.

We left the lodging house, moving to the entrance of the gray building next door. It was five stories tall, with lots of windows.

“Come on in.”

I nodded at Lord Tris, stepping inside. As soon as we entered, he showed something that must have been identification at the reception desk nearby. When I started getting flustered because I didn’t have any of my own, the lady at the desk just smiled at me.

“I’ve heard all about you. Welcome!”

Giving her a little bow, I kept following Lord Tris. After walking through the hallway for a little bit, my view suddenly expanded. There was a very large atrium in the center of the building, filled with more people than I could count. There was a woman with purplish-red hair wearing a white robe with a yellow stole standing on a platform by the wall. As soon as she saw me, she beckoned me over.

“Chelsea, over here.”

Doing as she asked and stopping beside her, I could see the faces of the people in the hall. Off to the side was a group of girls and boys

around my age or a little older, all wearing the same black clothes and gray robes. I could see that Lady Margaret was one of them, giving me a scornful look. Besides them, everyone wore white robes with red, blue, yellow, or green stoles.

Is it okay for me not to be wearing a robe at all? I wanted to ask, but it really didn't seem like the time to. I'd have to ask Lord Tris later.

The woman clapped her hands loudly, and the hall fell silent.

"This is Chelsea. She has just awakened to a new type of Skill. Make sure you treat her well."

I froze up as everyone's eyes fell on me. I could see Lord Tris signaling for me to bow in the distance, so I rushed to lower my head politely.

"I'm the Chief of the Royal Research Academy. The kids in gray robes are the control trainees, and the people in white robes are all researchers. You can tell who works where by the color of their stoles. Yellow means martial arts, red means magic, green means technical, and blue means unique. We'll be doing research and observation of your Skill, but I will promise you that we'll never be rough with you. That's it; meeting's over."

The moment she finished, everyone who had gathered around her split off to their own sections again. The only ones who were left were the Chief, Lord Tris, and Lord Glen, who had appeared during the Chief's introduction.

"Let me welcome you once again to the Royal Research Institute," the Chief said after we stepped down from the platform, holding her right hand out towards me. I immediately took it with my own right hand, shaking it. "I'll be leaving everything else to Tristano. He's a lot more capable than he looks, so you can depend on him."

Unlike the strict air she had about her on stage, she was smiling now.

"Eugh... What do you mean by that... Stop it already..." Lord Tris groaned.

"I'm only telling the truth. I'll be returning to my room now." The Chief walked away, leaving Lord Tris looking doubtful. Lord Glen moved closer to fill in her place.

"You cut your hair. It looks nice," he said with a gentle smile. *He really is like an angel...* "Due to the special circumstances, I'll be taking part in your research too, Chelsea."

I nodded at his words, only to get another pat on my head. He'd patted my head a lot since we first met. *Is he treating me like a little kid?* I mean, yeah, I was short, but... I was twelve, and in three years I'd be an adult, just like him. But even as I started to think that way, I remembered Lady Medisina calling me "ugly, useless, and unsuitable to be a member of the Eucharis Barony," and I fell silent again.

“And Tris, while I’m here, make sure to treat me like Glen the researcher,” Lord Glen said, fluttering his white robe.

“What? You can’t be serious... Only in front of Miss Chelsea, okay? It’ll all be on you if the higher-ups get after me later, okay?”

“Yep. I’ll take care of it.”

They started whispering to each other partway through, but I couldn’t really catch what they were saying.

+ + +

The three of us left the hall, moving to a sunny laboratory in the south part of the building. Inside the lab was a big table with four chairs, a desk and chair for studying, a three-seat sofa, and a lot of bookcases.

“This is your personal lab, Miss Chelsea,” Lord Tris said, sitting me down in a chair by the table. He sat on the other side, while Lord Glen sat down on the sofa. “Gotta check first, but what is your Skill?”

“My Skill is, apparently, making any kind of seed I wish for.”

After I told him what Lord Glen had told me, Lord Tris started flipping through some papers.

“Kay, just as the report says. Can you show me once as an example?” he asked, pointing to a tray laying on the table. When I just looked at the tray, tilting my head, he said, “Is something the matter?”

“Um... How do you use Skills?”

“Oh, that’s right, you only got appraised a few days ago. Of course you wouldn’t know.” He grimaced, before explaining, “With most Skills, you just think of what you want it to do while saying the Skill name out loud. You can also say what you want to happen out loud before the Skill name, when you don’t wanna mess up, or while you get used to it.”

When Lord Glen had used [Cure] back in the carriage, he’d added “Cure her emaciation” before saying the Skill name, too.

“Now then, try it.”

I nodded, before whispering, “Make a seed — [Seed Creation].”

A round, flat seed the size of my thumbnail appeared out of nowhere, dropping onto the tray with a plink.

“You did it. What kind of seed is this?” Lord Tris asked, looking at the seed from all angles.

“A pumpkin seed,” I replied. That’s what I’d been imagining before I said the Skill name.

After you break a pumpkin open, the seeds are all inside mixed with the guts. And when you break through the seed’s shell, you can eat what’s inside. I was so happy when the old gardener told me that... Since the cooks usually threw them out anyway, Lady Medisina couldn’t get mad at them for giving seeds to me. I was shocked to learn that I

could create something to eat on days when I went without food.

“Kay, so we’ve got one pumpkin seed. How many can you make with one cast?”

“Let me try. Make some seeds — [Seed Creation].”

This time, I said the Skill name while imagining lots of pumpkin seeds. But only a single seed appeared...

“Just one, huh...”

“I’ll try again. Make some seeds — [Seed Creation].”

I tried again, doing the same thing. But still, only one seed dropped down onto the tray.

“Seems like you can only make one per cast,” Lord Tris noted, jotting something down in his notes with a pen. “Next, I want you to try to make some other seeds.”

“Is any kind okay?”

“Yep, as long as it isn’t a pumpkin seed.”

I nodded, imagining a different kind of seed as I whispered, “Make a seed — [Seed Creation].”

A sunflower seed dropped down onto the tray. You could eat the insides of them, too.

“That’s a sunflower seed, right? Great! Now try another one.”

I was about to nod again, but then I froze. I couldn’t think of any types of seeds other than pumpkin and sunflower... There were no flower beds back at the Eucharis manor, and all the old gardener did was cut the grass, take care of the lawn, and trim the shrubbery. I’d never seen him plant any seeds.

When he noticed I wasn’t moving, Lord Tris tilted his head, asking, “What’s wrong?”

“Um, I... I don’t know any other seeds...”

“Ahh, I see... That’s a bit of a problem.”

“Anything she doesn’t know, she can learn.” Seeing Lord Tris and I fall silent again, Lord Glen spoke up from his spot on the sofa. “We can ask the gardeners to show her lots of different seeds.”

Oh yeah... I can just learn... Before, I’d done nothing but get yelled at, so I never had a chance to learn, so I could just start now! I nodded to myself at his words.

“That’s true! Then let’s just see how many you can make for now.”

“Alright,” I said, before making a bunch of sunflower seeds in a row.

“Kay, we’ve got three pumpkin seeds, and six sunflower seeds. Next’ll be number ten.”

I nodded. Since I’d made more sunflower seeds, I’d switch to pumpkin again to even things up. I cast it again. “I’ll make pumpkin seeds next — [Seed Creation].”

At the same moment a pumpkin seed dropped onto the tray with a

plink, my body suddenly felt super heavy, and I lost consciousness.



Interlude 1: Glen and Tris

A thunk echoed through the room.

“Wh—!?”

“What!?”

Chelsea, daughter of Baron Eucharis, and owner of the brand new Skill [Seed Creation], slammed her head against the table in front of her. She didn’t move an inch afterwards.

I jumped up from the couch, running over to her and checking her out. I didn’t have to use my [Appraisal] to hear her snoring gently.

“Why’d she fall asleep so suddenly!?” Tris exclaimed, standing half off his seat.

Turning [Appraisal] on silently, I looked at the status floating above her head and saw that her mana bar was flashing red, empty.

“It looks like she ran out of mana and fell asleep.”

“Oh, that’s right, you’ve got a High Level [Appraisal] Skill, huh!”

I forced a smile. [Appraisal] was a Skill that let the user see things about a target, and could be used silently once they practiced enough.

Skills were divided into 5 levels: Sage Level, High, Upper, Mid, and Low. According to a person’s [Appraisal] Skill level, the user could learn the target’s name, age, health points, mana points, status ailments, Skills, class, titles, all kinds of things. But for every level but Sage, the target would be able to hide things if they wished hard enough. Aside from that, statuses other than the truth could be shown, if the target had been convinced otherwise by the people around them. For example, if a kid who didn’t know their own birthday was told, “today’s your birthday,” by someone, and they believed them, the kid’s birthday would show up as that day to [Appraisal].

Things someone *really* wanted to hide, and things they’d been convinced otherwise of, could only be seen by Sage Level users. And there weren’t even enough of those Sage Level [Appraisal] users in the world to count on one hand... *But I miiiiight have been one of those few.*

Unlike all the lower level [Appraisal] users, Sage Level users were special because they could increase the amount of information shown to them according to how much mana they used to do it. Seeing the target’s name, health, and mana bars barely took any mana, for example. But on the other hand, using enough mana to put me out of commission for the day, I could see everything... Including things that the target themselves didn’t know, or had been hiding.

Honestly, since it was such a cheat Skill, I just told people that I was High Level instead. The only ones who knew the truth were the King and his Queen. And by the way, I could easily count how many times I'd actually exhausted myself using [Appraisal].

"But she's only made ten seeds total. Does Miss Chelsea's Skill really take that much mana to use?"

"No, the Skill doesn't take much mana at all."

"So why'd she fall asleep, then?"

"Because her total mana is ridiculously low. The Crown Prince has more at three-years-old than she does now."

"That's way too low!" Tris nearly shouted in shock as he stumbled backwards.

Chelsea grew up abused in the Eucharis Barony. Since she was barely given the absolute minimum nourishment necessary, she was much shorter than a twelve-year-old should be, and withering away. Plus, she'd been beaten, whipped, and suffered mental abuse as well. I could tell all that immediately from the status ailments on her.

Since her situation was so severe, it would take a Sage Level [Cure] user to heal them all. Sage Level users could bring anyone to their normal state, as long as they weren't dead. Be it lost limbs, severe burns, difficult status ailments, they could all be cured. But they couldn't heal illness... Because it was such a miraculous Skill, Sage Level [Cure] users were worshiped as Saints, and there were only a few.

I may or may not also be a Sage Level [Cure] user, too... The only ones who knew that were the King and Queen, and the Royal Healer, Ishel.

If I could, I wanted to heal all of Chelsea's status ailments. But if it was discovered that I was Sage Level, the Church would make me a Saint, and I'd probably end up having to leave the country. Since I owed so much to His Majesty, I wanted to avoid that.

"Let's move her to the sofa for now," Tris said while I was lost in thought, scooping Chelsea up. "Wow... She's twelve, right? How can she be lighter than my eight-year-old niece?"

He looked upset as he laid her down on the sofa. *Oh yeah, when I first lifted her up from the shrubbery, she was just skin and bones...* Of course she would be, since she'd barely been fed. I hadn't checked her weight when I used [Appraisal]. It'd be rude to do that to a twelve-year-old girl.

Wait, has anyone with the [Appraisal] Skill other than me checked her out? I'd reported that she had a bunch of status ailments, but I hadn't specified any further. *If I got the King's permission, I might be allowed to use [Cure] to heal them all!*

"I just feel so bad for her..."

“So do I. Which is precisely why I need to go check in with the higher-ups.”

“What? The only person higher than you is...!”

I nodded at him, and left the room.

3. Out of Mana

I woke up to the sound of lots of bells. It was probably around midday. After sitting up and having a stretch, I looked around, not recognizing where I was. No one else was in the room.

When did I fall asleep? Having another look around, I saw that I was on a sofa, and there was a big table nearby... *Ah, that's right...* This was my personal lab, and Lord Tris, Lord Glen, and I were investigating my Skill. As soon as I made a tenth seed, my body suddenly felt heavy and I fainted... Or rather, fell asleep. Was that normal?

As I tilted my head in thought, the door opened with a click. It was Lord Tris, carrying a bunch of things.

"Oh, great! You're up! I brought you a sandwich from the dining hall." Saying that, he set the plate with the sandwiches, two cups, and a jug of water on the table. He then filled the cups. Tempted by the sandwich, I walked over and sat in a chair.

"Now, let's eat!" he said, sitting in the chair across from me.

"Thank you," I said, giving a short prayer to the earth god before picking up a sandwich. It was about one-fourth the size of a normal one, and it was filled with lettuce, sauce, and chicken.

I was drooling, but since I didn't know sandwich-eating manners, I observed Lord Tris first. He just shoved it in his mouth, though, so I did the same. It was delicious! The crunchy lettuce and the salty-sweet sauce-covered chicken went well together. *Mmmm!*

The sandwiches were tiny, but I was full from just a single one. As I had a drink, I realized Lord Tris was staring at me. After that, he poked his own forehead. I wasn't sure what he was trying to tell me.

"After you made a tenth seed, you ran out of mana and fell straight asleep, like this," he said, mimicking slamming his head against the table.

"Huh?"

"Skills use up mana. When you get low, you start to get tired. And when you're completely out, anyone would just conk out like that."

While I listened to his explanation, I felt my forehead, and realized there was a bump there.

"Made a real good thunk."

It didn't hurt, but it didn't feel nice either. I furrowed my brow, while Lord Tris looked at me worriedly.

The door clicked open again, and in came Lord Glen. "Looks like you're awake again. And Tris is here, great."

"How'd it go?"

Giving me his usual gentle, angelic smile, Lord Glen sat down in the chair beside me.

"Cutting straight to the chase, we're going to be cutting Chelsea's Skill research time down for now."

I tilted my head, not knowing why things were changing so suddenly.

"As it is, Chelsea, your total mana is less than that of a three-year-old."

"What!?" Less than a three-year-old... But I was twelve!

"If we're going to keep studying your Skill, first, we're going to have to seriously focus on increasing your mana pool," explained Lord Glen, pausing to look in my face. "Actually, do you even know what mana is, Chelsea?"

What mana is...? I knew it was in your body, but I didn't really feel it. I shook my head at his question.

"They never taught you, huh."

I'd been cleaning the manor for as long as I could remember. I never went to school like common children, or got to study with private teachers like Lady Margaret. I was taught how to read, write, and do basic math by the old gardener, the chefs, and maids. They excused it by saying I'd need to be able to read the cleaning products' names and directions, but now that I thought about it, they were probably doing it for my sake.

"After talking with the higher-ups, we've decided that other than Skill research time, Chelsea needs time to grow her mana pool and study."

Did that mean that I'd be allowed to learn stuff...? I blinked at Lord Glen.

"I'll be teaching her. Which means, Tris, you're going to have some free time."

"Sounds like it."

"You'll be helping out the Chief."

"Y-You don't mean... Paperwork!?" Lord Tris bemoaned.

"No, you'll be working the fields."

"Really!? That's perfect!" he cheered, raising both hands in the air.

But wasn't field work hard? I tilted my head confusedly at Lord Glen, and he gave me another pat.

"Tris has the [Earth Magic] Skill, so he's good at working in the fields."

"Yep! It's great, seein' all the crops lively from my magic!" Lord

Tris' eyes sparkled. He must have really loved working out there.

"So for today, Chelsea will have the rest of the day off, while Tris..." Lord Glen started.

"I can go to the fields, right? Got it! See ya, Miss Chelsea!" Lord Tris said quickly before leaving the room with a skip in his step.

"No, err... I was going to tell him that he'd be starting in the fields tomorrow, so he'd have today off, but..." Lord Glen mumbled, watching after him with a conflicted look on his face. "Whatever. Since he's gone, we can talk about something else."

What would we talk about? He looked really serious, so it must have been important. I sat myself up, looking at him.

"I did it yesterday in the carriage, but I want to heal your wounds today."

My hands shot to the bump on my forehead from when I whacked it against the table when I ran out of mana.

"Other than your forehead, you've got lots of other cuts and bruises, right? Since I used [Appraisal], I know all about them."

Since he'd appraised my Skill too, I wasn't surprised to find out that he knew about everything else.

"I'm going to heal everything, but I've got one request, okay?" I nodded.

"I dunno if you trust me or you're just pure-hearted... I'd think you'd ask what's going to happen before you'd agree..." He was muttering something with a strained smile. I was about to ask what he said, but he shook his head at me lightly. "I'm going to be healing all of your status ailments too, but my request is for you to keep this all a secret."

"Okay." I nodded, lower this time. I didn't know why he'd want me to keep it a secret, but if he wanted me to, I would.

He gave me another gentle smile, patting my head once again. "It'll probably be pretty bright, so you should close your eyes."

I immediately did as he asked.

"...I know I was the one to ask, but she just closed her eyes that easily while alone in a room with a man... I'm worried for her future...! Maybe I should teach her that kind of thing, too..." He was muttering again, but I didn't catch any of it.

"Heal all of her wounds and status ailments — [Cure]!"

The moment he cast it, it felt like a wind started blowing through my body. It'd stumble and stop in places, but it eventually faded.

"You can open your eyes now."

Opening them slowly, I saw Lord Glen's dazzling face in front of me.

"How do you feel? Anything off?"

Spurred by his words, I touched my forehead, only to feel no

bump. I could move my arms and legs like normal, but they seemed even lighter than before.

“I don’t...think so,” I replied.

“Have your maids check out your wounds when you get back to your room. I’ll walk you there,” Lord Glen said, getting up.

Though the lodging house was really close, I was really tired. I thought I’d fall asleep walking.

“Are you okay?” I could hear Lord Glen asking me, but I couldn’t answer. I felt something hold my hand, though. It was warm... *Holding someone else’s hand is so comforting...*

While I was spacing out, we reached my room. Right as soon as we walked in, Lord Glen explained things to Gina and Martha, “I had a healer use [Cure] on Chelsea. Her wounds should all be healed, so check for me.”

“As you wish.”

“Other than that, she had a bunch of bad status ailments like Inhibited Growth, so they cured those as well. There might be some big changes, so just watch out.”

“It seems like she’s already falling asleep...”

“Yeah. It might be a side-effect of healing those status ailments. Take care of her.”

Gina and Martha bowed deeply to him. They were talking about something, but I was so sleepy, I didn’t catch any of it. Just as I was about to collapse, Lord Glen caught me. After that, he just lifted me up, but I couldn’t move.

“I’m...sorry...”

I managed to squeeze out an apology, but I couldn’t stay awake any longer. His face was so close. Idly thinking that his dark blue hair was sparkling, I fell asleep.

Interlude 2: Margaret

My name is Margaret, daughter of Baron Eucharis.

Just yesterday, Lord Glen, a nationally-recognized Appraiser—*who was wonderful and as beautiful as an angel!*—appraised me as needing to go through special training for my Upper Level [Fire Magic]! Those who were deemed as needing training were to be sent to the Royal Research Academy. This was an incredible honor among nobles.

The Royal Research Academy was on the same grounds as the royal palace. Being sent there meant that they could enter it earlier than when they turned fifteen and became an adult. And in doing so, they could also search for a marriage partner earlier than other nobles. But that wasn't all. If you were especially skilled, you could go on to become a researcher, knight, or mage. Your success in life would be guaranteed, but my useless twin sister was here, too... *What's the big deal about having some new Skill? Trash like her shouldn't be here.*

"This is your room. Wear what's in the closet under the bed. You can't do your training wearing anything else. If you need anything, you can buy it from the shop inside the gray building next door, the Royal Research Institute. Before the eighth bell, we will be meeting at the reception desk right inside there as well. I could explain anything you don't understand, but you didn't want to shake my hand, so you must be fine on your own, right?" My instructor, Mirabel, gave me a challenging glance before leaving my room. All I did was not shake her hand because I thought she was a commoner. I didn't know why that would anger her.

"Why is she so bothered that I didn't shake her hand!? It's not *my* fault!"

After yelling that, I looked around the room I was shown to. On the right side of the room was a ladder and upper bed, with a closet and storage space underneath. On the left was a desk and chair. That was it. There was no maid to take care of me.

"Why is my room so small!? And *why* isn't there a maid for me!?" I yelled again.

A second later, there was a knock on my door. "May I say something?"

Suspicious of who could be at the door, I opened it. There I found a very unhappy looking blue-haired girl who seemed to be around my age.

“Hey, I completely understand that you’ve just arrived, but could you quiet down? Your screaming is too loud.”

My face burned at her words. I hadn’t meant to be that loud!

“And I’ll let you know another thing. Your family is renting this room for you,” the blue-haired girl sighed. “Screaming about how your room is too small, and you don’t have a maid... Aren’t you embarrassed to be spreading that your family is poor?”

I lowered my head, humiliated.

“If you need a maid, have your family send you one. But they’ll also need to rent a room for them,” she said flatly before turning around and leaving.

Frustrated, I could only bite my lip.

After that, I spent a while emptying my bags into the closet. As I did, I saw the ugly black clothes Mirabel had mentioned. *Telling me to wear this... Is she just bullying me?* Not feeling like doing anything else that day, I went to bed with an empty stomach.

The next morning, I woke to the sound of footsteps in the hall. Putting on a yellow dress that I’d brought from home, I looked out my door to see what was happening. Everyone was wearing those ugly black clothes with a gray robe on top, and heading somewhere. I went to follow them, but the blue-haired girl from the day before stopped me.

“What are you wearing? Control trainees can’t enter the Royal Research Institute wearing their normal clothes. Didn’t your instructor tell you?”

“Huh?” I know she had said something when she showed me to my room, but I couldn’t remember what.

The blue-haired girl continued, “Just go put on the black uniform from your closet—and a gray robe. As a control trainee, you won’t be able to get into the Institute after the eighth bell.”

I rushed back into my room, quickly getting changed. Once I stepped back into the hall, it was empty. I ran through the halls, and as I was going down the stairs, the bells started ringing. Somehow, I managed to get inside the Royal Research Institute before the eighth bell chimed. As I was gasping for breath, Mirabel spoke up.

“You’re late. I thought you weren’t coming. We’re going now.”

Mirabel started walking away without waiting for me. I’d never been treated this way before in my entire life. My mother and I were always treated with reverence by the maids in the manor. Even my useless sister bowed to me... I couldn’t believe this!

Still out of breath, I chased after her. She led me to her room, and gave me an introduction, but...

“You trainees are doing your control training here at the Institute for us. Which means you can leave whenever you want, if you don’t

want training.”

Leave? To my tiny room with no maid... I was about to announce I was going home. But before I could, she continued.

“Those who leave before completing their training will have to live wearing a Mana Sealing Bracelet,” she said, pointing to a bracelet displayed off to the side of the room. “Those bracelets are only used for criminals and failures. So, what are you going to do?”

“I’m staying!” I screeched angrily. I’d never become a failure like my sister.

“I see. If you’re staying, then you’ll have to obey our rules here in the Institute.” Mirabel peered at me with a stern look in her eyes.

“Just like I told you yesterday, control trainees must all wear their black uniforms and gray robes. They serve as your identification, and wearing them lets you eat for free in the lodging house.”

So I have to keep wearing these drab black clothes the entire time I’m here!? I wanted to complain, but Mirabel kept on speaking.

“There’s a communal bath and laundry room in the lodging house for your use. If you don’t want to wash your clothes on your own, you can pay to have the laundrymaids do it for you.”

I’ve never done laundry... And I don’t have any money. I’ve never used it before... My mind blanked out as I realized that. *What should I do... What could I do...* But an idea suddenly came to me while I was worrying. *That’s right! I could use my failure-of-a-sister as a maid!* Once I realized that, I was able to listen calmly to Mirabel’s explanation.

She went on to explain how living in the lodging house worked, and how we’d be trained. Afterwards, we headed to a hall on the first floor of the building. Inside were lots of people wearing white robes with different colored stoles.

“Go stand with the other trainees over there.”

I scowled at her ordering me around, but I did as I was told. *Why are there so many people gathering here?*

After a while, a woman with purplish-red hair stood on a platform in the middle. The woman was acting self-important, just like my grandfather Marquis Ackroyd acted back at home in the manor when he came.

“I’ve called you all here today to introduce a new colleague.” After she said that, the whole room began buzzing.

A new colleague? She must mean me! Why else would all these people be gathered here! Just as I was about to step forward, the woman looked towards the entrance.

“Chelsea, over here.”

What? Why is she calling my sister’s name? While I was in shock, my sister stepped onto the podium wearing a light green dress. She wasn’t wearing the same black and gray outfit we were, even though it was

supposed to be mandatory.

The purplish-red haired woman clapped her hands, silencing the room. "This is Chelsea. She just awakened to a new type of Skill. Make sure you treat her well."

My sister timidly bowed. *Why should I treat my trash sister well!?*

"I'm the Chief of the Royal Research Academy. The kids in gray robes are the control trainees, and the people in white robes are all researchers. You can tell who works where by the color of their stoles. Yellow means martial arts, red means magic, green means technical, and blue means unique. We'll be doing research and observation of your Skill, but I will promise you that we'll never be rough with you. That's it; meeting's over."

I didn't get a chance to complain before all of us control trainees were shuffled to a big room. The moment I entered, I could hear people talking.

"Lady Chelsea, was it? I'm so jealous that she's awakened to a brand new skill."

"I heard that she won't have to wear a robe because she'll be treated as a special researcher."

"She might not have to usually, but she might in formal situations."

"Huh? What color stole would she wear?"

"I think it would be the highest rank, purple."

"Isn't purple the color that only royalty can use!?"

"That's amazing!"

"That isn't amazing at all!" I spoke up, causing all the trainees to stop and look at me.

"Do you happen to know Lady Chelsea?" The blue-haired girl who spoke to me earlier asked.

"She's my older twin sister! Let me take this opportunity to tell you *all* about her," I said. Everyone edged in closer to hear what I had to say.

Listen to me as I explain just how much of a failure my sister is! I went through everything that happened at home for them. How her appearance, personality, and actions were all completely inferior to me. How she was such a failure that we had her do the cleaning. How she'd always have to be whipped for not cleaning properly.

"Do you understand how my sister is trash, now?"

As I finished my explanation, everyone who had listened started whispering to each other, glancing in my direction.

"Lady Chelsea was very cute...but she did seem quite thin."

"...Rather than thin, she looked like skin and bones."

"If they're twins, why is one withering away while the other is perfectly normal?"

“And making Lady Chelsea wake up so early to clean the entire house...”

“They *whipped* her as punishment!?”

They all turned to me at once. The blue-haired girl stepped forward, almost as if she was representing them all.

“So your twin sister was abused?”

“No! My sister is garbage. All we did was discipline her!”

The only thing I had wanted to do was tell everyone how much of a failure my sister was, but for some reason, it made everyone stay away from me.

4. How to Grow Your Mana Pool

I awoke to a clicking sound. From the sun coming through the cracks in the curtains, I could tell that the sun was fairly high in the sky. *Did I oversleep?* I went to sit up, thinking that, but was stopped by Gina.

“You mustn’t get up yet.”

“Why?” I asked, tilting my head.

She blinked at me for a second, before answering, “You’ve been sleeping for three days straight, Lady Chelsea.”

“Huh?” I was shocked.

“According to the healers, your body needed a break after your status ailments were cured. We were told that once you had awakened, we should keep you in bed until a second examination.”

“Okay...” I replied, nodding from my spot on the bed.

A while later, an old man with a white beard that I’d never seen before came. He was wearing a black robe, and had a red stole across his shoulder.

“I’m Ishel, a Healer from the Mage Order,” he said, introducing himself as he touched my forehead and wrists. “Everything seems to be in order. But you mustn’t rush things. Keep resting in your room for now.”

“Thank you.” I slowly sat up and bowed my head to him.

“Ah, that’s right. I was told to give this to you once you awoke.” Lord Ishel pulled a book from the large bag he was carrying. “His Highness gave me this, thinking that you might want something to pass the time with.”

I opened it and saw that it was an illustrated guide to plants. But then, I realized he’d said something odd.

“His Highness?”

“Yes, he was very worried about you.”

With that, Lord Ishel gave me a smile and left the room.

The term “His Highness” is used for princes, isn’t it? Why is someone that important worried about me? No matter how hard I thought, I couldn’t think of an answer, so I decided to look at my new book, instead. Our first research session, I had only been able to think of pumpkin and sunflower seeds. If I looked through the book, maybe I’d learn about lots of other seeds to make.

With that in mind, I flipped through the book, and for some

reason, I was able to learn things easily. Up until now, anytime I'd tried to learn anything, it'd felt like my head was all foggy, and it would take a long time before I could remember things. The change might have been from Lord Glen clearing my status ailments. The guide I'd been given was centered on fruits and vegetables, and even included how to cook them after harvesting. Fantasizing about how each seed would grow, and what they could be cooked into after harvesting, the time just flew by.

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After a few days of bed rest, Lord Ishel finally gave me the go-ahead to get back to life as normal. Now I could finally return to the Institute. And thanks to my book, I now had a lot of ideas for seeds I wanted to create. I was ready and raring to go when Lord Tris came to pick me up.

"You look a lot better today!" he said with a big smile.

"I'm feeling better. Sorry for the trouble," I apologized with a little bow. *Oh, that's right! I could ask him about something I've been wondering.* "Um, I've been wondering since my first day, but am I not supposed to wear a gray robe, too?"

"If you were gonna wear a robe, it wouldn't be a gray one. But since you're a new Skill user, you don't have to wear one at all. Don't worry about it," he replied, a look of surprise on his face. "You seem kinda different now."

"What do you mean?" I tilted my head questioningly.

"Nah, nevermind!" Scratching his cheek slightly, he started walking.

I followed behind him, book in my arms. Our destination was my sunny personal lab. Lord Glen was waiting inside, with his usual gentle angelic smile on his face.

"I'll leave the rest to you! I'll be out in the fields!" After dropping me off, Lord Tris cheerfully skipped out. He must really love working the fields.

"Tris is making a field for all of the seeds you create," Lord Glen said as we watched Lord Tris leave. "After all, we can't be sure the seeds you make are really the seeds you wanted to make without growing them."

"So that means examining my Skill is going to take a long time, huh." The words just slipped out of my mouth, and Lord Glen gave me the same shocked look as Lord Tris had. "Is something the matter?"

Lord Glen looked above my head as I tilted it in confusion.

"...Not all of those status ailments were physical. Some of them were mental. So now that they've been cured, she can have conversations normally?"

He was muttering something, but I couldn't catch any of it. After a while, he gave my head a pat.

"Seems like you're feeling a lot better, so I'm going to teach you a lot today." He took my hand and led me to the table. Then, he sat in the chair across from me.

"I look forward to working with you," I replied, straightening my posture before giving him a proper bow.

"You don't need to be that formal. I'll be teaching you the basics on mana first," Lord Glen started. "Mana is generally described as something that most people can't see, but is in everything. Air, water, earth... Living things take it in from those to live."

I nodded, looking into his blue eyes.

"The mana we take in is stored inside of us in what we call the 'mana pool.' This is used up when you use Skills or magic, and refills when you eat or sleep."

"So the reason I suddenly fell asleep was because I emptied my mana pool, and had to sleep to refill it... Right?"

"Right," he replied, with a happy smile. "What we just talked about is what everyone is taught, but the real lesson starts here. New research has actually shown that eating delicious food grows your mana pool."

He kept going, excitedly, "It's always been a mystery as to why royals and nobles had larger mana pools than commoners. But now we know that it's because they'd been eating high-quality, delicious food since they were young. If we can get the common people eating the same kind of things, it'll grow their pools, and they'll have better lives. ...If everyone can use *Clean*, then there'll be fewer plagues."

Suddenly, he slapped a hand over his mouth, looking surprised. His ears were a bit red, too. After clearing his throat, his usual gentle smile returned.

"Anyway, from today on, we're going to have you eat delicious food to grow your mana pool."

"Eh?"

While I was busy being surprised, Lord Glen rang a bell that had been on top of the table. Knocking first, Gina came in, pushing a cart inside. Lord Glen then led me by the hand to the sofa. Gina laid a white cloth on the table, and put a big cushion on the seat I'd been sitting on. After that, she bowed to Lord Glen before pushing her cart back outside.

Next, Martha came in with another cart. It smelled sweet. I gulped, and Lord Glen gave me another pat on the head from his spot beside me. Martha quickly set tea and plates of sweets out on the table, before moving to stand by the wall.

"Looks like they're done. Let's go back over," Lord Glen said,

leading me back to the table by the hand again.

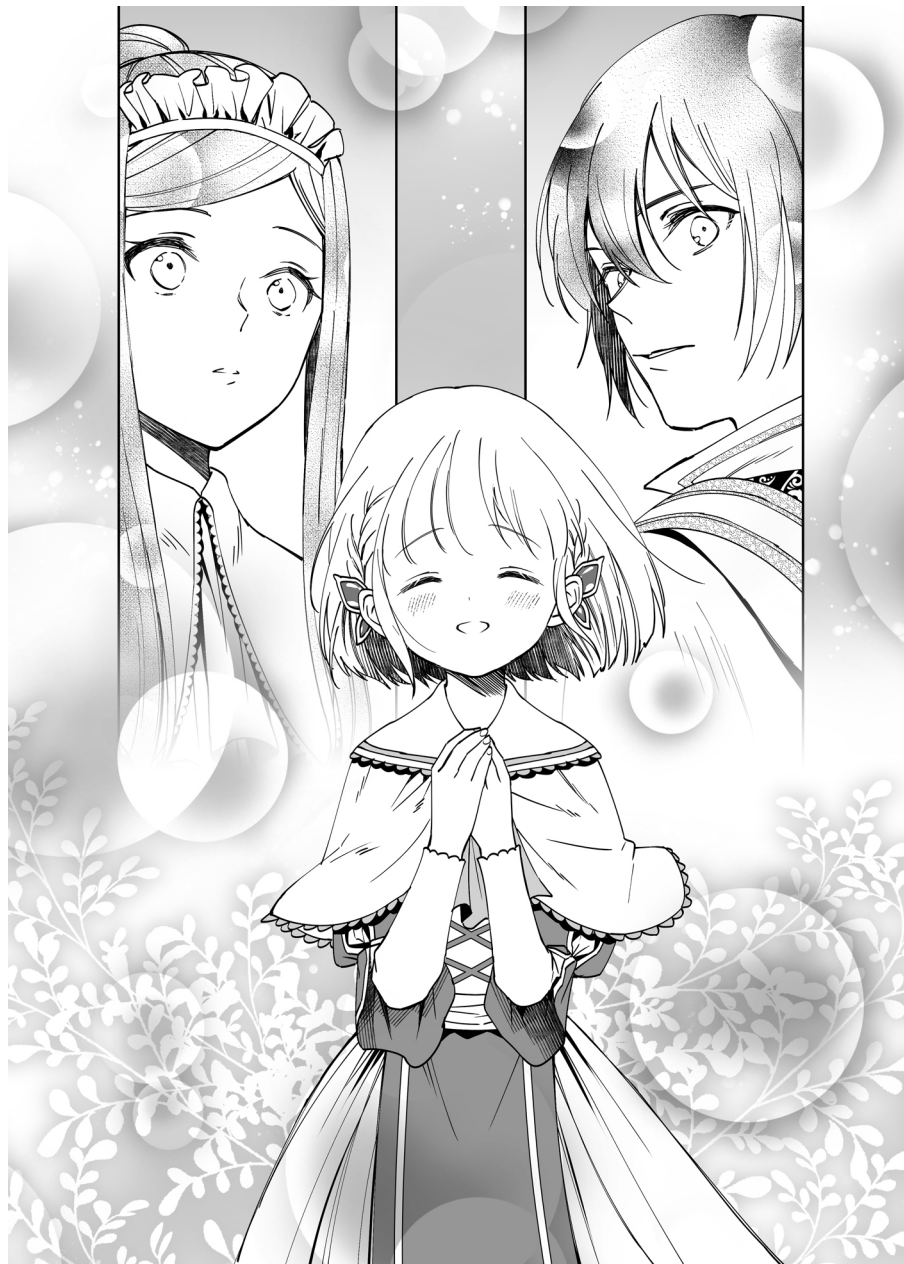
I sat on the chair with the big cushion. In front of me was sweets, not a delicious meal.

“Wow... They’re cute...” I murmured.

Lord Glen’s smile got even bigger. “Any delicious foods will work, so I had them bring us sweets. Now, let’s start our ‘Mana Pool Growing’ tea party.”

“I’ve never been to a tea party before!”

I was so happy, I smiled. The next instant, Lord Glen froze. I could see Martha in shock over by the wall.



Oh no! I let my guard down and smiled! Even though Lady Medisina and Lady Margaret always told me not to... I quickly put my usual emotionless face back on and lowered my head.

“...I’m sorry for showing you something so horrible...”

Lord Glen looked confused as I apologized. “What do you mean?”

“My smile is so ugly that I should never make anyone else see it...”

“Who told you that?”

“My mother, Lady Medisina, and my sister, Lady Margaret.”

As soon as I said that, Lord Glen stood. His chair clattered and the table shook, nearly spilling the tea in our cups. I looked up at him, surprised.

“Why do you use ‘Lady’ for both your mother and sister?”

“Since I’m such a failure, part of their disciplining me was having me call them that.”

“It just gets worse the more I hear...” he muttered, before sitting down again with a sigh. “I’m sorry for scaring you.”

“Oh no, it was my fault for smiling...”

He furrowed his brow. “I’ll be straight with you. You’re really cute. You’re not ugly in the least. So if you want to smile, smile,” he said, staring straight at me as he did. I could see Martha nodding along by the wall.

I’d never been told anything so positive to my face before, so I didn’t know how to respond.

“And I want you to forget everything you learned back at home as discipline. I’ll be teaching you about a lot of things instead, so focus on remembering what I say.”

“Okay.” I nodded.

If Lord Glen, a nationally-approved Appraiser and the person who cured me, was telling me that, I’d believe him.

“Now, let’s eat.”

“Okay!”

We gave a little prayer to the earth god before looking at the sweets spread across the table. Each sweet was small enough to eat in one or two bites.

“I should teach you what the sweets are called, too,” Lord Glen said before telling me what everything on the table was called.

The crunchy bread-like things were called scones, and were usually bigger. You ate them with jam or cream. The pink stuff in the little cups was strawberry jelly, and it wiggled. There were also little dark brown chunks of something called chocolate, which made me happy with just a bite.

After trying those three, I couldn’t eat another bite. The table was

still covered in treats I'd never had before, too. *Should I make myself eat more, just to grow my mana pool?*

"Only eat as much as you'll actually enjoy. It won't have any effect if you force yourself," Lord Glen imparted, seemingly realizing what I was thinking. "Let's just drink our tea and chat."

And so, he taught me the names of the sweets I hadn't managed to eat.

+ + +

After lunch at noon, Lord Tris came back holding two trays. His white robe was spotted with dirt, and I could tell he'd been in the fields all morning. He set both trays on the table with a smile. One was empty, while the other had a flower with the roots still attached.

"I got the flower and seed from the gardener. It's called baby's breath. I want you to try to make these seeds today."

Looking closely at the tray, I could see something near the edge. Apparently, baby's breath seeds were really tiny. After carefully studying the seeds and flower, I straightened myself up and cast my Skill.

"Make a baby's breath seed — [Seed Creation]."

With the tiniest clink, a little seed appeared on the empty tray. Lord Tris compared the seeds on each tray before nodding to himself.

"They look exactly the same. Tiny seeds like this have a hard time coming to sprout. Can you make four more seeds, just in case?"

"Okay," I replied, making four seeds in a row.

"Next I wanna get you to make a big seed. I'll bring you another example," Lord Tris said, starting to tidy up.

He must want to experiment to see how big the seeds I make can get. I suddenly remembered a big seed from my guide. Pulling it out, I flipped to the page, pointing it out. "How about this one?"

The seed I was pointing to was for something called a palm tree, which grew in warm climates. Specifically, I was pointing to one called a coconut palm, which grew fruit with juice inside.

"A coconut, huh? I forgot that was a seed, too," Lord Glen spoke up, getting up from the sofa to stand beside me with an interested look on his face.

Lord Tris was just staring at the page, enthralled. "I didn't even know this existed, but I'm interested! Let's do it!"

"Okay. Then... Make a coconut palm seed — [Seed Creation]."

As soon as I finished casting, a big brown seed rolled onto the tray. It was about the size of an adult's palm.

"So this is a coconut, huh! It really is big!" Lord Tris grinned from ear to ear as he examined the coconut palm seed.

"So you can make seeds that you see in books..." murmured Lord

Glen, hand to his mouth as he stared at me.

“It looks like it. I’ll make lots more!” I was honestly happy, knowing that the more seeds I could make, the more it would help in researching my Skill.

“Coconuts are big, so let’s just go with one of them. Now, I wanna see you make some other seeds from your book.”

I nodded at Lord Tris before making another few seeds I’d wanted to try.

“Strawberry, melon, and peach seeds!”

“Those are all yummy fruits. I can’t wait to get ’em planted!”

Lord Tris’ eyes were positively sparkling as he looked at the seeds on the tray. They’d take a good while to grow, but I was really excited, too!

“Okay. Since you’ve used your Skill nine times already, we’ll stop here for today. Tomorrow’s our break day, so I’ll pick you up the morning after,” Lord Tris said before skipping out with the tray of seeds.

5. How To Spend a Day Off

Today was a day off for staff at the Royal Research Institute, and no one could go inside without special permission. Gina explained things to me while I ate my breakfast.

“Since you’re considered a member of the staff, please take the time to relax today.”

“What should I be doing on a day off?” I asked her, tilting my head.

Back at the Eucharis manor, the only days I could remember not working were when I was too feverish to move, or too injured from whippings the day before. After coming here, I hadn’t worked for the three days following my status ailments being cured, and then it was a few days more afterwards until Lord Ishel cleared me to get out of bed... So basically, I’d only ever rested when I wasn’t well.

“It’s my first time having a day off since I’ve been feeling okay.”

“I believe it would be best for you to do something you want to do...” Gina said, looking troubled.

“Something I want to do... Something I... Hmm...” I tried to think of something, but nothing really came to mind. “The only thing I can think of is wanting to thank the two of you for working so hard...”

Hearing my words, Gina and Martha brought their hands to their mouths, tearing up. Did I say something strange?

“Lady Chelsea, your feelings are all we need.”

“What you said now was thanks enough!”

They both shook their heads. I really couldn’t think of anything else... *Oh no*. While I was mentally groaning, Martha clapped her hands.

“Why not go for a tour of the facilities? You haven’t gone anywhere but the Royal Research Institute or the lodging house, have you, Lady Chelsea?”

“No, I haven’t.”

Martha smiled. “There are lots of different facilities within the citadel! You can make it a field trip!”

“That’s a good idea, coming from you,” Gina followed up. “It would be good for her to know where the Knights and Mage Order are.”

Martha puffed her chest out proudly, and in return, Gina lightly mimed slapping Martha’s stomach. They were so funny that I couldn’t

help but grin. Seeing my expression, Martha looked really happy, while Gina looked like she was on the verge of tears again.

I could just hear Lady Medisina's voice reprimand me. But at the same time, I remembered how Lord Glen had said to smile when I wanted to smile. I'd decided to believe him instead. He'd told me to forget everything I was taught as discipline in the manor, so I shook off Lady Medisina's words from my mind.

"Lady Chelsea, your smile is cute enough to make everyone around you happy."

"If you're having fun, or find something amusing, feel free to smile!"

"Okay!" I replied, doing just as they said.

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While I was drinking my after-meal tea, Gina left the room. A little bit later, she came back in with a man I didn't know. He was impressively tall, with broad shoulders and short black hair, and he had the same little yellow cape on his shoulder as the guards outside my door. He looked older than Lord Glen, but he might have been around Lord Tris' age.

"I am the second son of Margrave Sargent, Marxfort, and Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights. Please, call me Marx," he introduced himself with a bow.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Chelsea, and I'm the daughter of Baron Eucharis," I rushed to reply, jumping to my feet and bowing my head. I still hadn't learned how to introduce myself like a noble yet... *I need to learn, quick!*

"It's an honor to meet such a lovely lady. Would you care to tour the citadel with me today?"

It looked like Gina had left to go bring Lord Marx here. I couldn't help but wonder if someone as important as a Deputy Commander should be showing me around.

"Um, is it okay for someone like me to go with you?" I asked. He gave me a big smile, with teeth so white it was almost blinding.

"It's *because* it's you that it's alright. Let's get going."

"O-Okay!"

Getting caught in his pace, I followed him out of the room. Outside, there were two knights I hadn't seen before.

"These two will be your guards today. Treat them as if they aren't there. You'll have to become used to doing so as a noble."

It'll be hard to just ignore people who are right here... But if it was normal for nobles, I'd have to get used to it. I gave the two guard knights a little bow, and they gave me big smiles back.

"There are various buildings and facilities inside the citadel. The

castle where the royal family lives, the royal castle itself, guest houses, the Knight's guardroom, the Mage Order's laboratories, the library, the gardens... The list goes on. Quite honestly, we could never tour them all in one day," Lord Marx explained as we walked north from the lodging house. "Today, I'll be mainly showing you the western side. We'll go to the building closest to the lodging house first. To the immediate north is the guardroom for the Second Order of Knights. If you need anything, we will come running."

As we walked north, there was another brown brick building beside the lodging house. On the wall by the entrance was a yellow banner with some sort of symbol.

"Yellow is the color of the Knights. The guards stationed outside of your room are knights as well. The Second Order's headquarters is elsewhere," Lord Marx said with another big smile. "Across from the Knight's station and beside the Royal Research Institute is the library. You should be able to borrow and read anything you wish, Miss Chelsea. I hear that you've been reading botanical guides to go along with your Skill, but it may be good for you to read other, normal books as well."

"I'd like that," I said, nodding to him.

Back at the Eucharis manor, I'd snuck looks at a picture book to make sure that I could read properly. It was about a poor girl who transformed thanks to a mage. I used to dream of a mage coming to save me too... The book was taken away from me immediately, but I remembered having a lot of fun. *To think, I can read like that again...!*

Excited, I headed towards the library. It was a round and tall building, like a tower. Inside, books covered the walls, and it was shockingly dark.

"Sunlight fades the books, so they're kept out of it. When you need to look for a book, you can either use the spell *Light* or borrow a magic tool."

Since I couldn't use magic, I borrowed a lantern-shaped magic tool and began aimlessly looking for a book to read.

"I'd suggest something from around here," Lord Marx suggested helpfully, leading me to a shelf of stories. I picked a book titled "Fairy Story" that looked interesting. It was about a fairy born from a flower, who fell in love with a prince. *What if a fairy was born from one of the seeds I create?* It was fun just thinking about it.

The next place we went to was a big, well-maintained garden.

"This is called the Great Western Garden, and it's frequently used for parties. It's a strange spot. From the center to the north is off-limits because it connects to the royal family's living quarters. There's a barrier, so no one can even approach it without permission," he told me, knocking his fist against the barrier. I couldn't see anything, but it

looked like there was a glass-like wall standing there. I was slightly relieved to know that I wouldn't be able to accidentally enter uninvited.

"On the other side of the arch is a greenhouse. There's a little space to take a break inside, so let's head there."

Following Lord Marx, we moved to the greenhouse. Inside were flowers of all colors.

"Wow... It's so pretty!"

"I'm glad you like it. ...Oh, it seems I've forgotten something. Please wait here for a moment."

"Okay."

After Lord Marx showed me inside, he quickly turned and went back out. Since he asked me to wait, I started looking around at the flowers of various sizes. One certain flower caught my eye. It was light pink, with lots of petals. It was almost the same color as my hair. *I wanna make this flower's seeds someday.*

As I carefully examined the flower and its stem, I heard the greenhouse door open again. I turned around, thinking that it was Lord Marx, but instead, it was my younger sister, Lady Margaret. She was wearing a showy red dress she used to wear back in the manor, and her hair was pulled into a ponytail. I was surprised, since she usually left it down at home. Looking a bit closer, I saw that her skin was breaking out, and her hair wasn't as shiny as before.

As I was inspecting her, she was looking me over from head to toe too.

"Why is someone as ugly as *you* wearing such nice clothes!" she screamed, shaking with anger.

Ugly... Lady Margaret called me that all the time at home, but I hadn't been called ugly once since I got here.

"Trade clothes with me! That's an order!"

'That's an order'... Lady Medisina used to say that to me too, but this was the first time that Lady Margaret had.

"Why should I trade clothes with you?" Words I never would have said up until now slipped out of my mouth. "This dress was in my room. You were given a room just like mine, weren't you? There might be something similar inside your walk-in closet."

I hadn't heard anything about the rooms for people with new Skills and control trainees being different, so she surely was getting the same treatment as me. Why wouldn't she have a big room with maids, and a walk-in closet filled with clothes?

I just went with the momentum and kept talking. But Lady Margaret's eyes just widened, her face going red with rage. She lifted her hand and charged at me. *She's gonna hit me like she did back at home!* I shut my eyes tight and braced myself for impact, but it never

came. Hesitantly opening my eyes again, I saw the guard knights standing between us.

“W-What!?”

“We’ve been ordered to eliminate anyone who harms Lady Chelsea,” one of the guards said, shielding me.

Hearing that, Lady Margaret’s face got even redder. “That *THING* is my older sister! I’m not harming her, I’m disciplining her!” Saying that, she tried to get at me by going around the knights, but it didn’t work. One of the knights grabbed her by the arm, twisting it up behind her. “O-Ouch! Let me go! LET. ME. GO!!”

But no matter how much she screamed and struggled, the knight didn’t soften his grip. While this was happening, Lord Marx walked back inside the greenhouse holding a basket. He frowned when he saw Lady Margaret.

“Sir Knight! Please, save me! I was just trying to discipline my sister, and these men grabbed me!” Lady Margaret screeched at him, seemingly not noticing his demeanor.

The knight who wasn’t holding her walked up to him and whispered something in his ear. In response, Lord Marx nodded a few times before completely ignoring her. Walking back up to me, he gave me another smile.

“I apologize for the wait. I’d forgotten to pick this up,” he said, opening the basket’s lid slightly to show me what was inside. Bagels and a bottle filled with a drink peeked out at me.

“Oh, it’s no trouble at all, Lord Marx. It looks delicious.”

Seeing me answer him, Lady Margaret screeched again, begging, “Your name is Lord Marx, Sir Knight? I am the daughter of Baron Eucharis, granddaughter of Marquis Ackroyd! Stop these insolent knights, please!”

Lord Marx heaved a great sigh before turning towards her. “I haven’t introduced myself to you yet, nor have I given you permission to use my name. Haven’t you been taught that it’s disrespectful to call a royal or noble by their name without permission?”

I couldn’t see his face, but I could tell from the low tone of his voice that he was angry. He’d been so warm to me, but it was scary how cold he was to Lady Margaret. She paled, looking away in silence.

Heaving another big sigh, Lord Marx turned back to me. But there was no anger in his face, only his bright smile from before. He scooped me up easily with the arm he wasn’t using to hold the basket.

“Uweh!?”

“Let’s get going. Hold on tightly so you don’t fall.”

He didn’t seem to mind the strange sound that came out of me. I clung to his neck just as he ordered.

Carrying me through the greenhouse, he came to a stop in an open area. There was a wooden table and chairs, so this must have been the break area he mentioned. He lowered me onto one of the cushioned seats, set the basket on the table, and then bowed before me.

“Though it was only momentary, my act of leaving your side resulted in an unpleasant experience for you. Forgive me.”

“Oh, no! I wasn’t hurt thanks to the guard knights. Please, don’t bow to me!” Flustered, I tried to get him to raise his head.

Really, between the daughter of Baron Eucharis and the son of Margrave Sargent, the latter was higher in rank. *He shouldn’t be bowing to someone lower than him!*

I was relieved when he straightened up, but he immediately bowed again. “And though it was an emergency, it was terribly rude of me to pick up a lady.”

“I-I don’t mind, it’s alright. Please, raise your head.”

Just as I was begging him again, we heard footsteps. Lord Marx shot up, standing ready. The person who approached was one of the guard knights, who walked up to him with a serious look on his face before quietly whispering something.

“...I see,” Lord Marx responded with an equally serious face, before the knight turned and left the way he came.

Turning back to me with another bright smile, he started unpacking the contents of the basket onto the table. When I tried to stand up to help, he stopped me. Setting some cups and the bottle inside on the table and leaving the basket open, everything was ready.

“I thought that the greenhouse would be hot, so I had some chilled fruit water prepared for us,” he explained as he poured the splendidly cool drink into the cups and set them on the table. “Let’s eat.”

“Okay.”

After saying a short prayer to the earth gods, I took a piece of one of the bagels, which had been cut into quarters. Lord Marx also grabbed one, and ate it by taking a bite out. I guessed I wouldn’t have to rip it apart like bread, so I bit into mine too. Inside was smooth cream cheese, salty ham, and lettuce.

“Salty food is always better after walking around a lot.”

“Yeah, it’s really good,” I said, remembering to swallow what was in my mouth before speaking. After eating only a fourth, I was already full.

“If you’re full, can I eat the rest?”

I nodded as I drank my fruit water, and he popped the bagel into his mouth.



Once we finished eating, Lord Marx looked to me.

“There are some things that I need for you to know,” he started. “First, just for confirmation, the girl from earlier said that she was your sister. Is that true?”

“Yes. We don’t look like each other, but I was raised as her twin sister.”

“Then I’ll get to it. Do you understand that you and your sister’s positions at the Institute are different?”

I shook my head no.

“You’ve come to the Royal Research Institute at the request of the country. In simple terms, you’re a guest of honor, Miss Chelsea.”

A guest of honor is a super important guest, isn’t it? And I’m one? I had a huge, wonderful room prepared, with my own maids and knights to guard me. Thinking more about it, I realized how well I was being treated.

“In comparison, that girl has come here to undertake control training as her duty. Which would make her a student.”

I could understand the difference between a student and a guest of honor. *Huh? Then wouldn’t that would mean her room isn’t as big as mine? And that she might not have personal maids?* That must have been why she was wearing one of her dresses from home, and was breaking out. I didn’t realize, but I said something horrible to her...

“Today, she tried to raise a hand against a guest of honor. Even if you are sisters, that’s unforgivable,” Lord Marx said with a grim look.

Back at the Eucharis manor, I was frequently disciplined by Lady Margaret with beatings. But this wasn’t the manor. We couldn’t act as we had at home here.

“From how she spoke, you were frequently abused under the guise of discipline, weren’t you? We’ll make sure that she can’t come anywhere near you anymore, so don’t worry.” He gave me another bright, teeth-flashing smile.

Interlude 3: Marx

After we finished our lunch, I walked around the Great Western Garden with Miss Chelsea. From the garden, you could see the royal residences, guest houses, and the center of our government, the royal castle. I told her to avoid going near them unless she had to. There were many nobles who would jump at the chance to use someone with a brand new Skill like hers. It would be awful if she was found by one of those hyenas and suddenly talked into an engagement before she knew it.

While she didn't smile, her eyes sparkled curiously wherever I led her. I'd heard that she'd been abused back at home, but from how she acted, the possibility that she had been held captive as well had arisen. After cursorily showing her around the western part of the citadel, I brought her back to the Institute's lodging house.

"If anything happens, make sure to tell someone around you immediately. I swear that the Second Order of Knights, especially, will protect you from anything." As I told her that at the doorway of her room, both of the knights who had acted as her guards gave strong nods as well.

"Alright. Thank you very much."

Then, she bowed deeply. I could only imagine how hard her life must have been, for the daughter of a noble to act that way. I gave her another bright grin to try to act as cheerfully as possible.

"Thank you for giving me a tour, Lord Marx."

Gratefully taking her last comment, I left, returning to the guardroom with the two knights who had been guarding her. They both went off on their breaks, while I entered the deputy commander's office.

"Welcome back, Deputy Commander. Hm? Has something happened?"

The moment I walked in, I heard a voice. The owner of it was my aide and fiancée Stacey.

"In a sense, yes..."

"It's not like you to put on airs like that," she said with a smile, cleaning up the documents on my desk. That had been my job originally, but after taking on the role of Miss Chelsea's guide, Stacey did my paperwork for me.

After wandering the room for a bit, I sat on the sofa with a thud.

Stacey glanced at me, but didn't say anything. She must have been waiting for me to start. "I've told you about that aunt of mine that my grandparents, parents, and uncles doted on, right?"

"Yes. When I went to visit your family, I was shown many portraits while being told about her. There were a lot of them, from when she was first born to one in a gown after she became an adult," she recalled, forcing a smile. "I heard that she left home soon after that to find 'true love.'"

I nodded. "It ended up being that her 'true love' was Baron Eucharis. Apparently, they met while she was masquerading as a common adventurer..."

Stacey looked shocked, slapping a hand over her mouth. She must have been trying to hide her dropping jaw.

"And so, they married while she was still pretending to be a commoner, and died a few years later without birthing a child... Or so we were told."

She wordlessly pressed me for more information. After making sure no one else was around to hear us, I continued, "...Miss Chelsea is the spitting image of my aunt."

"Miss Chelsea was the lady you just gave a tour to, wasn't she? I heard that she had awakened to a brand new Skill, and was Baron Eucharis' daughter...!?"

"Yes. Her hair was a different length than my aunt's in her portraits, but Lady Chelsea had her unique pink-gold hair and the amethyst eyes particular to the Sargent Margraviate. She was terribly thin, but her face was near identical."

"But your aunt died without giving birth to a child, didn't she?" Stacey asked, staring at my face.

"I also met Miss Chelsea's *twin sister* today. She called me by my nickname before we even greeted each other. She's nobility, but she acted like a commoner." I scowled, thoroughly repulsed. "Her younger twin sister's hair and eyes were red, and they didn't resemble each other at all. And that's when I thought... What if Miss Chelsea was actually my aunt's child?"

Stacey looked shocked at my revelation; she looked me in the eyes and nodded. Just what I expected from my fiancée. I was glad she got what I was going at so quickly.

"That's something worth investigating."

"So can I leave it to you?"

"Who do you think I am?"

"My beloved Stacey, who has both the High Level [Search] and Mid Level [Appraisal] Skills," I replied immediately.

She smiled at how quick my response was. Her [Search] Skill let her assess exactly what she wanted out of various information. She

could find just where the books she wanted in the library were, pick out only the necessary information from paperwork, or pick out only [Fire Magic] users from a group of people... That kind of thing.

“Fufu, leave it to me. But I need to finish this paperwork first.”

“That was supposed to be my job originally. You focus on your special mission.” I stood up and headed towards my desk. Seeing me coming, she mercilessly tossed the documents towards my direction.

“I’ll leave it to you, then,” Stacey said, leaving the room with a skip in her step.

I should be fine letting her do the background checks. But one other thing that needed doing was writing a letter to my father, the current Margrave.

“Saving the ill-fated princess is the knight’s job,” I muttered, while starting to flip through the paperwork.

6. The Seed of the Spirit Tree

The morning of the day after our break, I had another mana pool-growing tea party with Lord Glen. Today's main treat was pancakes covered in cream, so he taught me utensil etiquette. You held the knife in your right hand and the fork in your left, and cut things into bite-sized pieces before eating them.

I had a lot of trouble, since I wasn't used to it. But when I managed to bring it to my mouth, the sweetness of the cream and the fluffiness of the pancakes spread around my mouth, and it was delicious. *Is eating yummy things really necessary for growing your mana pool?* Without the [Appraisal] Skill, I couldn't tell if it was doing anything. I could have asked Lord Glen to use his on me, but asking a nationally-recognized Appraiser to do it was far too scary, so I didn't.

In the afternoon, after our lunch, Lord Tris came with an old scroll and a dictionary.

"Last time, you created seeds that you saw in your book. If you can do that, you might be able to make extinct or fictional seeds after looking at documents that describe them!" Saying that, he unrolled the scroll on the table before me. On it were pictures of a big tree and leaves, and letters that I'd never seen before.

"What does it say?"

"Apparently it described the World Tree in ancient script," he answered, flipping through the dictionary to translate every character.

Lord Glen got up off the sofa, walking up to our table. He took a look at the old scroll and said, "...This isn't about the World Tree, but Spirit Trees."

"Huh? Spirit Trees? Wait, forget that, you can read ancient script!?"

"Yeah, thanks to my Skill."

Maybe his [Appraisal] Skill let him read things like this. Lord Tris just dropped his dictionary hearing this apparently shocking revelation.

"If you can understand ancient script, you'd be able to read the murals on the temple's walls, or the stone monuments around the border..." he muttered quickly, staring into the void. Since it wasn't his usual slow tone, I didn't catch a word of it.

"Spirit Trees are 'Trees that birth Spirits who can cleanse the miasma,' or so it says," Lord Glen continued, completely ignoring Lord Tris' outburst. "They can be duplicated through cuttings from the

Origin Spirit Tree, and the leaves can be used for mana potions, while the trunks keep the miasma away.”

A tree that births Spirits—that’s just like the “Fairy Story” book I borrowed! Tree cuttings were when you removed branches or stems from a tree and planted them directly in the earth to make more trees. The old gardener had done it a lot.

“It also says that the Origin Spirit Tree was burnt in a mountain fire long ago, so they don’t exist anymore.”

“Does it say anything about the seeds?” I asked.

“Nothing on here, no.”

Up until now, I’d memorized what seeds and grown plants were like in reality or my book, and only been able to summon those ones I knew. If it didn’t say anything about the seed, I didn’t know if I’d be able to create it.

“Chelsea, your Skill is to create the seeds you *wish* for. You might be able to do it if you wish, even without seeing anything about it.”

“If I wish... Okay. I’ll look closely at what’s on the scroll first.”

I examined how the old scroll illustrated the leaves and twigs, and how it looked as it grew. I also asked Lord Glen what exactly was written in the annotations, and learned about everything but the seeds.

“Okay, I’ll try to make it now!”

You never know what you can do until you try. This is for investigating my skill, anyway. I clasped my hands in front of me in a prayer-like fashion, before whispering: “I want to make a Spirit Tree seed — [Seed Creation]!”

Right after I cast it, something rolled onto the old scroll, making a bigger thunk than usual. It looked like a clear glass orb, just a bit bigger than my fist. A size I could hide in my hands.

“Hah...! You actually made a Spirit Tree seed!? Wait, it looks like a marble.” Lord Tris had still been staring into space and muttering while Lord Glen and I were talking, but he came back to his senses when I made the seed, going back to his usual calm tone. He looked at the clear orb from different angles, while Lord Glen’s eyes widened in shock.

“How did it go?” I asked timidly.

Lord Glen covered his mouth, and said, “My [Appraisal] is showing it as a ‘Spirit Tree Seed.’”

“Woooh!” Lord Tris cheered excitedly, and went to touch it, but Lord Glen grabbed his hand to stop him.

“Its full name is ‘The Spirit Tree Seed That Chelsea Created,’ and the notes say, ‘Only Chelsea should touch it. Quickly dig a hole in a sunny, large space near Chelsea and bury it’...”

My jaw dropped, not understanding what was happening. We all

seemed to be at a loss for words, but after a bit, Lord Glen broke the silence.

“The best spot near Chelsea would be outside this lab. Let’s bury it there,” he said. I nodded in response.

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“Okay, we’ve got permission,” Lord Glen announced as he re-entered the room. We could do whatever we wanted in my personal lab, but we needed permission from the higher-ups like the Chief to do anything outside.

“Let’s go plant it, then!” Saying that, Lord Tris grabbed the scroll and opened the door leading outside from the lab. Outside was just a patch of lawn that was about the size of my room.

“Plant it as far away from the building as you can.”

“How about here?” Lord Tris pointed to a spot about three carriage-lengths away from the building.

“That should be good.”

“I’ll dig a hole, then — [Earth Magic]!”

With a rumble, a hole big enough to put the Spirit Tree seed in opened in the ground. It was the first time I saw [Earth Magic] used. It really did seem quite useful for field work, and fun!

“Kay, drop the seed in here. Since it says ‘bury’ rather than ‘plant,’ I made it a bit deeper than usual!”

“Alright.” Nodding to Lord Tris, I walked to the hole and dropped the glass orb-like Spirit Tree Seed inside. *It looks really deep...*

“I’ll bury it now — [Earth Magic]!” The moment he cast it, the hole closed in on itself with a glub.

We stared at the little mound of dirt left for a while.

“It doesn’t look like it’s going to sprout immediately,” I murmured, and the two men nodded in response. The notes in the [Appraisal] were strange, so we all seemed to have misunderstood.

But just as we were about to leave, the ground began to shake. I almost fell from the sudden movement, but Lord Glen caught me. I was shocked to be held like a princess.

“Thank yo—!?”

When I tried to thank him, something sprouted from the ground with a big roar. It was clear like glass, just like the seed had been, and it sparkled. Once it grew to about my height, it started sprouting leaves. Instead of growing to a sapling, it seemed to have skipped right to a tree.

I clung to Lord Glen in shock, while Lord Tris went to work comparing the leaves and things to what was illustrated on the scroll.

“The leaves are the same shape as what’s drawn here. But they’re clear like glass.”

Lord Glen was just staring at the tree... He was probably using [Appraisal].

"It says that it's the 'Origin Spirit Tree,'" he announced.

"But the Origin Spirit Tree doesn't exist anymore..."

"It means you made a new one, Chelsea." He softly smiled at me from close enough that our noses nearly touched. His angelic smile was right in front of my eyes... *Wait, he's still holding me!?* When I started panicking, he gently set me back down on the ground.

"T-T-thank, you...!" I managed to blurt out, which just made him smile wider as he pat my head.

Lord Tris was completely ignoring us, examining the Spirit Tree. "That's weird... Didn't the scroll say it's supposed to birth Spirits?"

"Yeah, it did, but it didn't say how."

"So we're gonna have to just watch and wait, huh..."

Lord Glen nodded. After that, we stood there until dusk, but nothing else happened that day.

+ + +

The next morning, I headed towards the lab with a restless Lord Tris. Opening the door, the room was dark, not at all like usual. *This room is supposed to get the most sunlight in the whole Institute... This is strange.* Thinking that as I stepped farther inside, I saw that Lord Glen was standing at the window. And beyond him... The outside scenery was all green. I blinked in surprise.

"Good morning, Chelsea. It was already like this when I got here."

"Good morning, Lord Glen... It's gotten really big overnight, huh."

Walking outside, I could see that it had grown to the second story of the Institute. When I looked up, I saw something sparkle. Just as I was thinking I imagined it, something fell fast from above, stopping just before it hit the ground.

What had fallen was a translucent man wearing a light cloth around him, and he was floating. He was inhumanly beautiful, with big earrings that looked like the Spirit Tree's leaves hanging from his ears, and a jingly-looking necklace on his neck. His hair was long enough to reach the ground. *Since he's see-through and floating, he can't be a human... Right?*

While I stood there dumbfounded, the translucent man stared not at my face, but the spot above my head.

"It seems that you are the one who birthed me. You should do."

After nodding to himself, the translucent man snapped his fingers. Suddenly, I couldn't hear anything. No sound of the wind blowing through the leaves of the trees, no far off voices, nothing. I looked around in shock, only to see that Lord Glen and Lord Tris were frozen in place.

“According to the reason of the world, time must be stopped when contracts are made,” the man explained, grabbing my right hand.

“I am Element, King of the Spirits. Here, I will make a contract with thee.”



As he said that, my thumbnail sparkled. Then, the transparent man snapped his fingers again, and the sound came back.

“Refer to me as ‘Ele’ from now on,” Lord Ele whispered, and there was a sudden gust of wind. It was so strong that I had to close my eyes for a moment. When I opened them again, he was gone.

“H-Huh? He’s gone. What was that?” Lord Tris gasped.

“It seems we’ve made a contract.” I explained what had just happened to both Lord Glen and Lord Tris.

Lord Glen looked above my head, furrowing his brow. “It’s true, you did make a contract with the spirit. Your occupation now shows as ‘The Spirit King’s Contractor.’”

Lord Tris’ eyes went wide at Lord Glen’s explanation.

“The notes say he’s ‘summonable near the Spirit Tree.’ Want to try?”

“Okay.” Nodding to him, I whispered, “Lord Ele, are you there?”

The next instant, a fluffy silver kitten appeared floating in front of me with a gentle gust of wind. The kitten, just big enough to fit in both of my hands, looked at me and said, «My beloved master, you may just call me Ele.» Its voice was the same deep one as the transparent man’s.

Almost sucked in by him, I slowly grabbed kitten Ele in my hands and yelled, “He’s so cute!” His fluffy kitten fuzz, his almost liquid-like soft body...

Back at the Eucharis manor, I’d seen kittens from the garden, but I’d never touched one before.

“He’s so soft and fluffy~!” I pet him all over in a trance.

«L-Let’s stop there! I am the King of Spirits, you know...!»

I could hear him, but he was just so cute and fuzzy that I couldn’t stop.

«Wa— Lady Chelsea...! Not my tummy, sto-stopppppp...»

A while later, the kitten-form Spirit was breathing heavily, exhausted.

After that, we went back to the lab to talk. Inside, it was still dark from the shade of the grown Spirit Tree.

“...It’s dark.”

“I thought we’d planted it far enough from the building, but... I didn’t think it’d get this big.”

Kitten Ele’s ears twitched as Lord Glen and I spoke. «Hmm... I will dispel the illusion during the day.»

Suddenly, the room got brighter. Looking outside, the green leaves and brown trunk of the Spirit Tree were going clear like glass, sparkling like it had the day before. The room might have even been brighter than it was before.

As I was thinking that while I held Kitten Ele, there was a knock on the door. Gina came in, pushing her cart. *Oh, that's right. It's just about time for our mana pool-growing tea party.*

"Let's talk while we have our tea," Lord Glen said.

Hearing his words, Lord Tris looked as if he'd just remembered something. "I wanna hear it, too! Lemme just go get the Chief's permission!" he yelled as he ran from the room.

Gina pushed the cart to the table, but froze when she looked at me. Looking closer, she was staring at Ele in his kitten form. For a moment, she had an enchanted smile on her face, before she went back to her usual serious look and started setting the table.

A white table cloth, delicious-looking sweets on trays, a teapot, and cups. It was pretty how she did it all so quickly without any wasted movements. When she was finished, she moved to the edge of the room. I could see her eyes were still on kitten Ele, so she must have liked cats.

"Let's start our tea party first. We can talk when Tris gets back," Lord Glen said with a soft smile, gently pushing my back.

I was about to sit down on my cushioned seat, but then I realized, "Um, would it be bad manners to eat while holding Ele?"

"Hmm. There are some people who eat with their pets in their laps at unofficial events, but in your case, since you're learning manners, you should put him down."

"Okay," I replied with a nod, before looking down at Ele.

«I'll sit on the sofa,» he said, jumping from my arms. Then, he tottered over to the sofa and went to jump...and missed. «This body is too small, I can't reach...!»

He was so small he fit on my palms, after all. Just as I was about to go help, Gina did instead. Gently picking him up, she set him back down on the sofa. Her eyes were sparkling, but she quickly put her work face back on as she moved back to the wall.

"Let's eat."

Sitting in my chair, I said a prayer to the earth gods. *I'm gonna start with this jiggly flan!* It jiggled just like jelly did, but the flavor was completely different.

"...Mmmmm!"

It was so delicious, I couldn't even form words. I blushed, embarrassed, but Lord Glen just smiled happily from his spot opposite me.

"Looks like the flan is your favorite, Chelsea."

Lord Glen looked towards Gina, who nodded in agreement.

"...Yes, it does."

Sometimes I saw them conversing without words. *Is this a special Skill?* I kept eating my flan as I wondered. Once I finished my flan and

was asking about the other sweets' names, Lord Tris came back.

"Sorry I took so long." His white robe was covered in dirt. He must have gone to check the fields.

"Since Tris is here, let's get to the explanation," Lord Glen said as Lord Tris sat down in an empty chair. Our eyes all fell on Kitten Ele, curled up on the sofa. Seemingly sensing our gazes, he sat up.

«Firstly, I thank you deeply for recreating the Origin Spirit Tree,» he started, before bowing towards me. *The little kitty is bowing, how cute!* Gina's eyes were sparkling again, so I wasn't the only one thinking it.

"Um... Can I ask something?" Lord Tris raised his hand. "All I can hear is meowing. What's he saying?"

I was hearing the same deep voice I heard from him in his spirit form, but maybe other people couldn't hear him at all.

«In this form, only my contractor and those with certain Skills can hear my voice.»

"Oh..." After that, I started repeating what Ele said in kitten form.

«Spirits are beings who come to this world via the Spirit Trees to cleanse the miasma.»

"The old scroll said that, too," Lord Tris mumbled as he frantically transcribed every word that Ele spoke.

«Miasma is something that kills plants, pollutes water, and drives humans and animals mad.»

"That's really dangerous, isn't it?" I asked, and Ele nodded in response.

«I want to send more Spirits to this world to cleanse the miasma, but that will require planting more Spirit Trees. And Spirit Trees can only be grown from cuttings from the Origin Tree.»

I nodded along, since that's what the scroll said, too.

«And the only one who can do cuttings is the one contracted to me, the Spirit King.»

"Huh?"

«Among those present, Lady Chelsea was the most suitable. That is why I entered a contract with her.»

There's nothing we could do if that was the reasoning. Both Lord Glen and Lord Tris had indescribable looks on their faces.

«Please, spread the Spirit Trees. You can begin after the Origin Spirit Tree grows further,» said Ele, bowing deeply once again.

"I can't do it right now, since my Skill is being researched, but if it's okay to do it when I find time..."

He nodded at my answer.

"I need to report this to the higher-ups. Let's skip the afternoon experiments for today."

"Okay."

“I’ll go tell the Chief,” Lord Tris said, rushing out of the room.
Lord Glen and I stood up at the same time.

“I’ll bring you back to the lodging house,” he said with his usual gentle smile.

But what would Ele do? I thought. “Wanna come back to my room with me, Ele?”

«I cannot move far from the Spirit Tree yet.»

“Okay... See you tomorrow,” I said, leaving the lab with Lord Glen.

Interlude 4: Glen and Spirit King Ele

After dropping Chelsea off at her room, I headed back to the lab. When I stepped inside, I could see a tiny silver kitten curled up on top of the sofa. When he saw me, he stretched before sitting up straight.

«It has been long since I'd last seen a reincarnated being,» said the kitten in an unexpectedly deep voice.

“Can you keep that a secret from Chelsea?” I asked, giving him a fake smile that I wouldn't give in front of Chelsea.

«I know. I won't do anything boorish like revealing that, so cease that bloodlust.» Kitten Ele gave a sigh before looking me in the face. «Why have you returned here?»

“There's something I need to do, and other things I need to ask,” I replied as I walked outside. Ele hopped off of the sofa, following me on his short little legs.

The thing that I needed to do was...put a Barrier around the Origin Spirit Tree that Chelsea grew. From what he'd told Chelsea, it was an easy target, and having it right beside the castle was incredibly dangerous.

“How big is it gonna grow?”

«At full height, it should be just about as tall as this building,» the kitten surmised, gesturing a paw towards the five-story Institute.

“I should be able to manage that... *Barrier*.” I cast the spell, wishing that the Spirit Tree would be protected from all who could harm it. I could feel a huge amount of mana drain from my body. Since it not only had to be large, but very strong as well, the mana use was ridiculously high. But with this, it'd take someone as strong as me or greater to remove the Origin Spirit Tree that Chelsea planted.

«So you created a barrier...» Kitten Ele was shocked. «I thank you.»

“If you're thankful, can you tell me something?”

«Alright,» the kitten responded, nodding.

We returned to the lab, and both sat on the couch.

“So, will you tell me everything you couldn't tell Chelsea?” I asked, a fake smile still plastered on my face.

After looking at me for a moment, Ele looked downward. «These last few years, Spirit Trees have been chopped down, and the spirits could no longer come to this world. I don't know why it's being done. But if someone was to be able to plant more Spirit Trees, they would

definitely become a target.»

It was the exact reason I'd guessed. "So you contracted with Chelsea to protect her."

The kitten nodded again. «You aren't surprised.»

"I've heard rumors that large amounts of miasma have been popping up in other countries."

Spirits were beings who could purify the miasma, and Spirit Trees were the gates from which they appeared. My guess was that whoever was chopping them down didn't know about the purifying process, and they were being collected only for their beauty. That was probably why the miasma was appearing.

«This world and the spirit world are two sides of the same coin. If the miasma harms your own, it will end up harming ours. As King, I must stop it.»

I nodded at the kitten.

«And it is for that reason that I must have Chelsea plant many Spirit Trees.»

"I dunno about that..."

«What do you mean?»

"With Chelsea's Skill, couldn't she make seeds to purify the miasma...or maybe even suck up the miasma?"

«I see...!»

"The problem is how that could put her in even more danger."

«Hmm...»

"I'll do everything that I can," I said, before leaving the lab.

7. Berserk

The next day, Lord Tris came to the lab empty-handed. Usually, he'd have a plant and seeds he wanted me to make, or a scroll, or even just a tray for the seeds to go on, so this was odd.

"We're going to the field today!" he announced happily.

"Ah, I've heard from reports that they're growing amazingly," Lord Glen replied.

"Yep! I want Miss Chelsea to see it with her own eyes!"

"Where are the fields?" I asked, only to get a huge smile from Lord Tris in return.

"The field for the seeds you make is outside of the capital. We'll be going there using a teleportation circle."

"Teleportation circle...?"

When I tilted my head in confusion, Lord Glen spoke up to explain, "Teleportation circles are magic tools that bring you to another set location when given mana."

"I didn't think anything like that existed." I'd just thought that they'd have a little field within the citadel, so I was shocked. "But that means Ele will have to stay here, huh."

«Yes. I cannot leave the Spirit Tree until it grows.»

I gently put the kitten-formed spirit down from my arms onto the couch. Following Lord Tris' lead, we left the lab, and headed to an area in the eastern part of the Institute. On the northern side were doors lined up with barely any space between them. Lord Tris went ahead and opened one of them. The room inside was only about the size of two beds, and there were no windows. Towards the right was a copper box on a table with a lamp above it, and in the center of the room was a big drawing of a circle.

Lord Glen gently pushed me to stand within the circle, while Lord Tris locked the door from the inside and put his palm on the copper box.

"The copper box and the circle on the floor together are called the teleportation circle. The box is to make sure you have permission to use the circle, and also how you supply the mana. For it to work, you need to stand inside the circle and give it the signal to work," Lord Glen explained as I looked on confused. "Also, since there are cases of people getting separated during use, always make sure to be holding onto another person when using it with two or more people."

“O-Okay!” I immediately clung to him. He gave me a soft smile before putting a hand onto Lord Tris’ shoulder when he stepped inside the circle.

“Let’s get going to the fields~!” Saying that, Lord Tris tapped his heel three times. Immediately afterwards, the circle shined bright white, and our surroundings changed. The gray walls became logs, and I could smell wood.

“This circle goes to this little wooden cabin,” he explained, stepping out of the circle. Following him, we stepped into a hallway before leaving the log cabin. Outside were wastelands, not fields.

“These are the training grounds. The fields are to the south.”

Looking towards where Lord Tris pointed, I could see a big palm tree.

“Huh? It’s already that big!?” Looking even closer, I could see the ground around it was covered in greenery.

“Yep. It grew fast!” he replied with a smile, nearly skipping along the path.

The closer I got to the fields, the more I saw, but... *What’s going on!?* There were six big sunflowers pointing towards the sun. The ground was thickly covered in green leaves, with little pumpkins peeking out. And in the very center was the tall palm tree. I could also see baby’s breath growing off in a corner. My jaw just about hit the floor.

“I’d heard about it, but... This is just amazing,” Lord Glen said in shock, covering his mouth with a hand.

“It’s really amazing! And every single seed sprouted! It doesn’t matter the temperature, all of your seeds just immediately go to bud! If you mass-produced edible plant seeds, hunger would be wiped out!”

Wait, does that mean that even if I’m sent back to the Eucharis manor after my Skill is researched, I could just make seeds for myself and never go hungry again? Thinking that, I could tell just how amazing it was.

Afterwards, I went around checking every plant. The coconut palm didn’t have anything growing from it yet; the strawberries were blooming little white flowers; the melons were spreading another green carpet of leaves away from the pumpkins; and the peach tree was about as tall as I was, but the trunk was still thin.

I’m so excited for them all! While I imagined how the fruits looked in my book, I heard a big explosion from far away. It looked like it came from the wastelands immediately in front of the cabin. I could see groups consisting of both adults and children facing each other. The adults all had red stoles on top of their white robes, while the children wore gray robes.

“Looks like they’re doing control training outside today,” Lord Tris piped up, looking towards the wastelands. “I had to do ’em when I

was twelve, too.”

“What do they do in control training?” I asked, staring at the students.

“A bunch of stuff, but I’m not sure what they’re doing today...”

“It’d be faster to see rather than to explain, so why don’t we watch on the way back to the cabin?” Lord Glen spoke up while Lord Tris was thinking.

The three of us looked towards the training grounds as we walked, and saw that the control trainees were making small balls of things like fire and water before showing them to the researcher who was observing. Then, the researcher would use magic to destroy the balls.

“Reduction training today, huh...” Lord Tris murmured ahead of me.

“People with High-level and above Magic Skills almost always end up casting strong, destructive magic when they don’t specify what they want. They need to learn how to make small, weak magic instead. That’s why they take control training, and that’s exactly what they’re doing today,” Lord Glen told me from his spot beside me.

“Isn’t that your sister, Miss Chelsea? Mirabel’s going hard on her.”

Following Lord Tris’ gaze, I saw Lady Margaret with her bright red hair, glaring at Lady Mirabel. I stopped to get a better look. Lady Margaret whispered something, before making a big ball of fire the size of a human head.

“Uwah, that’s huge. Something reduced would be like this — [Earth Magic],” Lord Tris said, casting his Skill to make a tiny ball of dirt the size of a pumpkin seed float before him. Then, it dropped to the ground.

Lady Mirabel made a big ball of water and erased Lady Margaret’s fireball, giving her a warning.

“Let’s get going.”

“Okay,” I nodded. Since I now had a better idea of what control training was, I started walking back to the cabin again. But then, I heard Lady Margaret’s voice.

“Hah!? [Fire Magic]!”

Turning around, I saw a flame giant, more than twice the size of a human, barreling towards me. I couldn’t hear it, but Lady Mirabel and the other researchers were using magic to lob balls of water at it in an attempt to stop it, but it didn’t work at all.

I was frozen in shock at the sight of it. If that thing got to me, I’d be burned to a crisp...

“[Earth Magic]!” With an irritated growl, Lord Tris summoned an earth giant that grabbed the fire giant. The fire giant struggled, still trying to run towards me.

“...Freeze. Barrier...” This time, Lord Glen cast in whispers, holding

his right hand out towards the fire giant, which started freezing from its feet up. The fire didn't disappear, only froze. *How...*



While I just stood there with my mouth gaping, the fire giant started shaking both its arms, lobbing fireballs towards me. But they were repelled by something invisible.

A few seconds later, the fire giant was completely frozen, and Lord Tris' earth giant crushed it to bits.

"You okay, Chelsea?" Lord Glen asked, but I couldn't get any words out. All I could do was nod.

"Didn't look like that was a mistake."

"Yeah, that was completely deliberate."

While Lord Tris and Lord Glen spoke, the researchers on the wastelands all restrained Lady Margaret, putting something on her wrist.

"No, I didn't mean to do that! She's tricking you all!" Lady Margaret screamed. "That trash is seducing Lord Glen... That's right, this was disciplining her! It's her fault!"

"It's a simple one, but looks like they've got a Mana Sealing Bracelet on her now. She won't be able to use her Skill anymore. I wish they'd seal her mouth, too," Lord Tris grumbled.

I couldn't understand what she was saying. Who was I tricking? It was rude of her to say I was seducing Lord Glen. And I knew now that her "discipline" was just plain abuse. Discipline was something for parents and adults to do, not your younger twin sister.

For a while, Lord Glen just stared coldly in her direction. Then, a bunch of knights came running towards the training grounds from the log cabin. Just as Lord Tris wished, they gagged Lady Margaret so she couldn't scream anymore.

"Let's leave the rest to them and get going," Lord Glen urged, and we headed towards the teleportation circle in the cabin once again.

Interlude 5: Glen

After bringing Chelsea back to her room, I headed to the royal castle to go talk to my brother.

Directly after the incident, I used my Sage-level [Appraisal] on Chelsea's sister Margaret. Using enough mana to exhaust me, I wanted to see everything she was hiding, and whatever she didn't know, either. The results showed something I needed to report to my brother.

I straightened myself up as I got to my brother's office door, and gave the knights on either side of it a signal with my eyes. The knights gave the warm wooden door a light knock, and another knight peeked out from inside. Once he saw my face, he got permission from my brother to let me in.

"Oh, Glen. It's been a while since you've come here."

"Your Majesty, I—"

"I've told you, just call me 'Brother' here! Do-over!"

"I'm glad that you're in high spirits, brother..."

My brother miiiiight just have been the King of Chronowize. He was a very capable king, and I had no worries about his reign. I respected him a lot as someone who would keep the peace and lead our country in a positive direction. But still, I wasn't very good at dealing with him...

"Yup, you really need to call me brother! Having my cute little brother call me 'Your Majesty' all the time since you were little just makes me wanna throw all my work away!"

The reason was simple. I was a proper adult, turning eighteen this year, but he still doted on me like a child and called me cute. No man would be happy being called cute at this age! *And please, don't talk about throwing out all your work just because I didn't call you brother!*

His brotherly love is just way too much! While I sighed, he just smirked.

"So something must've happened for you to come here to talk to me. I'll hear you out, so sit down."

I did as he asked and sat on the sofa, while he sat on the one across from me.

"It's about the girl with the new Skill I'd told you about..." I said, dropping the polite act. "We're still researching it, but I'm sure it's something that'll be a great boon to our country."

“I see.”

“Her Skill is something that’d be a huge loss if anything happened to her, but before she came here, she was abused at home.”

My brother perked up at that. “Nobles were abusing their child, even when the birth rates are this low?”

“And she has a *twin* sister, who’s been raised with love.”

“That’s suspicious.”

“Furthermore, just a bit ago, that sister who came to the Institute as a control trainee tried to attack her with a fire giant. Tris and I stopped it before it could get to her, of course, so there were no injuries.”

“Tris? Ah, you mean Tristano Forium, the eccentric son of Marquis Forium, with the three Skills.”

I nodded. Contrary to how he looked, Tris was amazing enough for my brother the King to know him by name. But I’d leave aside that for now.

“That girl must really have hated her sister to summon a fire giant and attack her as a control trainee.”

“They’ve got her restrained with a simple Mana Sealing Bracelet for now. But I appraised her closely after that, and learned something strange...” I took a deep breath before continuing: “They’re listed as twins on the Noble Registry, but their birthdays are different. It also showed that they’re sisters from different mothers.”

“Ah, falsifying records to the Noble Registry is a grave crime in our country,” my brother laughed.

“By the way, the sister’s mother is Marquis Ackroyd’s illegitimate child.”

“Marquis Ackroyd is just teeming with illegal deeds, too... That’s perfect.”

“I say we leave the sister hanging, call Baron Eucharis and his wife here, and use all of this to drag Marquis Ackroyd out. How about it, brother?” I suggested with a grin.

“Alright. Looks like things are gonna get fun. Do what you want.”

“Thank you!” Having my brother’s—rather, the King’s permission—I started thinking about what I could do.

“Before you leave, I just have one question for you, Glen.”

“And what would that be?” I said, going back to using polite language in my desire to get going.

My older brother stayed silent for a moment, looking serious, before continuing, “Why are you so interested in this Chelsea girl?”

“I’m...” I trailed off. For some reason, I couldn’t answer.

“Do you pity her for having been abused? Is it because her Skill will be a boon to us? Or is there some *other reason* you’re interested?” he said, breaking into a grin.

When I first met her, she was much smaller than other girls her age, and emaciated. I was angry when I realized she'd been abused, and I pitied her from the bottom of my heart. When I saw her Skill create a seed, I was excited at the possibilities. I really worried when she collapsed after depleting her mana. And after that, I fed her delicious sweets to grow her mana pool... And saw her smile. I felt bad for her when I learned she wasn't even allowed to smile.

If she was left with her rotten family, I knew they'd use her. And that's why I worried. *...Is there some other reason I should be concerned?*

"Hmm, looks like you don't realize it yet. You can answer me later."

While I was thinking, my brother kicked me out of the room.

+ + +

The next day... I was worrying from the get-go, even though it was a day off. I still had no response to my brother's question.

I tried wandering my room, sitting on the sofa, or on the side of my bed... After doing a bunch of things I usually wouldn't do, I pulled a notebook with a lock out of my drawers. Inside, I had written about Chelsea in a language nobody else knew...Japanese. I flipped to the page about the day she first made a seed by only seeing the plant in a book.

[It's possible for her to make any seed based on details she sees in a book. It could be used to grow medicinal plants unavailable in our country, or forbidden poisonous plants, extinct species, and even legendary plants. Next, we'll research if she can make fictional plants.]

Reading it over and over, I just sighed. With Chelsea's Skill, she could make any seed she wished for. If she ever made a seed that could spit poison or something, she could easily destroy a country. There's no way I could ignore someone like that.

From her personality and actions, I could see that Chelsea wasn't a bad person. Really, she had a brighter personality than you would expect someone who had been abused her entire life to have. She was open-minded, as well. But what I was really worried about was her abusive family. From what I'd learned of them, there was a chance that Chelsea may make a 'bad seed' because of their abuse. Which meant that my next course of action should be destroying them.

Just as I'd told my brother, I would leave her sister hanging for now, and while I wouldn't go so far as to have them all killed, I'd have her family properly punished. *What if I just brought Chelsea to our side anyway?* I thought. I could either make her a proper Royal Research Institute researcher and separate her from her family, or have a noble family I trusted adopt her. Then, I could crush the Eucharis barony without having to worry. *It would be a good idea to let Chelsea in on*

this.

And with that, I decided to arrange a tea party with Chelsea on the afternoon of our day off.

8. A Tea Party in the Rose Garden

Today was another day off for the Institute. Last time, I got a tour of the western part of the citadel by Lord Marx, the Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights and son of Margrave Sargent.

“What do you think I should do today?” I asked Gina.

Before she could respond, we heard a knock on my door.

It was a messenger from Lord Glen, asking if I’d like to have tea with him this afternoon. Since I couldn’t think of anything else I wanted to do, I happily agreed, and Gina smiled happily.

“Then we will need to use the morning to get you all spruced up for your tea party!” she said before leaving the room.

I have tea parties every morning with Lord Glen to increase my mana pool. So how come I have to get spruced up for one on a day off? While I tilted my head and wondered, Gina and Martha came back in with four maids I didn’t know.

“Since His Highness was the one to invite you, we’ll have you wear a gown today.”

Huh? His Highness? Wasn’t I having tea with Lord Glen?

Before I could ask anyone, I was brought to the bathroom and stripped. Then, the maids I’d never seen before gave me a thorough scrubbing. *They’re massaging while washing me! This is way too embarrassing, and it tickles...!* It made me realize just how easy Gina and Martha were on me.

Once I was washed, I had a little break as I soaked in the tub. Once I got out, I was wiped down, and massaged with nice-smelling oils.

Next, I was brought to the dressing room and put in a corset for the very first time.

“Normally, we would tie it up very tightly, but we must leave it loose so you can eat your sweets properly, Lady Chelsea,” Martha explained. Just as she said, it wasn’t tied up tightly, but it made me stand up straight.

After that, they put me in drawers that went down to my knees, and added petticoats on top of that, while the maids I didn’t know came back into the room.

“We’ve chosen a few gowns for you. Which one would you like to wear?” one of the maids asked, showing me both light and dark-

colored gowns. They were all much fancier than anything I'd ever seen at the Eucharis manor, so I didn't know what to choose.

"Um..."

"They're all cute, and would all suit you. Pick whichever one you'd like!" Martha said from her position beside me as I worried.

After looking closely at all of them, I chose a light pink gown.

"It's got cute flowers on it..."

When I tried to justify my choice, the maids just nodded. "It fits your image perfectly, Lady Chelsea."

"We should make her accessories and headdress flower-themed as well."

"Yes, that's a wonderful idea!"

The maids spoke among themselves before carrying the gowns I hadn't chosen outside of the room, and Gina entered as they left.

"Though you usually eat your sweets around now, you'll be too busy to do it today. That's why I brought you these," she said, showing me some bite-sized chunks of chocolate. They'd be easy to eat without getting my clothes dirty. "Please excuse me."

Gina popped a piece of chocolate into my mouth. I could taste the sweetness as it melted, and it made me happy. I tried my best to repress the hum I had at how delicious it was.

"Let's get you into your gown," Martha chirped, helping me put it on.

Gowns are impossible to put on alone, huh... There were clasps and laces on the back, and it was sewn very complexly.

Once I was dressed, Gina popped another piece of chocolate into my mouth. I didn't have time to savor it before the other maids came back with accessories and dressed me up. There were earrings, a necklace, and a headdress. I'd never worn anything like them before, so I couldn't help but stare at myself. They even put a little makeup on me.

"You look wonderful!" Gina praised me with a smile.

I was so happy that I spun in place, and the maids I didn't know complimented me, too.

"Next is manners," Martha started as we left the dressing room.

I remembered thinking about how I wanted to learn how to greet people properly as a noble when I met Lord Marx.

"So I'm gonna learn how to pick up the edge of my skirt and say hello?" I asked. Martha gave me a strained smile.

"It's called a curtsy, but the movement of your legs is much more important than your hands," she replied, before showing me in detail. You pulled one leg diagonally behind you, and gently bent the opposite leg at the knee... I couldn't do it properly, and I just ended up kneeling on the carpet.

“This is a lot harder than I thought...”

“You will get better as you practice,” she comforted me, lightly taking the skirt of her maid dress in her hands and curtsying.

“We’ll leave the curtsies at that for now,” Gina said, before showing me how to sit on a chair in a gown, and how to walk properly.

+ + +

When the first bell of the afternoon rang, Lord Glen came to my room. When he saw me, he covered his mouth in surprise. *Do I look weird?* I looked down at my gown, thinking that, but Gina and Martha and the other maids had done their best to get me ready, so I should be fine. I needed to be confident and greet him properly!

“Thank you very much for inviting me,” I said, carefully doing the curtsy I’d just learned, so I wouldn’t make a mistake.

Then, his expression changed to his usual gentle smile.

“I’d expected you to wear what you normally wore, so I was surprised,” he replied. Since I was wearing a headdress, he couldn’t pat my head like he normally did, so he stroked the back of my head instead.

By the way, he was wearing a shirt and vest, with a cape on top that was so dark a purple it was nearly black.

“It looks great. The flowers on the gown are really cute.” He complimented the part of it that I liked. For some reason, it made me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. “We’ll have a little walk in the garden, then have our tea.”

Lord Glen gave me another smile before leading me away by the hand. We went north from the lodging house to the area that Lord Marx had called the Great Western Garden. He kept walking north, without stopping.

Isn’t there a barrier there blocking anyone but a few from going in? Aren’t we gonna run into an invisible wall soon? While I was thinking that, we passed through easily. We were definitely in the northern part of the gardens. *How, though?*

As my mind continued to wander, we followed a small path to the side and went through a little arch. On the other side of the arch were lots of brightly colored roses. We were in a rose garden.

“Wow... It’s beautiful...”

“This place is a secret, so don’t tell anyone else, okay?” He placed his index finger over his lips, smiling. I felt like I was dreaming, so I nodded a few times.

We looked at all the different types of roses for a while. Red and pink, white and yellow, orange and purple... Some flowers were more than one color, or had more petals than others, so I didn’t get bored.

As we walked through the rose garden, I could see a little gazebo with a white roof.

"I've got the tea prepared over there. Let's go." Saying that, he slowly walked towards it.

Now that I think of it, we've been holding hands this entire time. Is he worried I'm gonna get lost? I might look a lot younger than I am because of my height, but I'm twelve already. Should I tell him I can walk on my own? Gina's lessons on how to walk with a man mean nothing like this...

While I was thinking that, we made it to the gazebo. Inside was a slightly older maid, who smiled at us. There was a round table in the middle, and there were half-sized rounded benches on either side, covered in big cushions.

Guided by Lord Glen, I sat in the middle of one of the benches, and the maid started working, putting hot tea on the table.

"Thank you," I said to the maid after she was done. Lord Glen's smile deepened hearing me.

"There are some things I'd like to talk about, but let's eat first."

After he said that, I gave a short prayer to the earth gods before looking at the cake in front of me. It was round, and about the size of my fist, with three layers. On the bottom was sponge cake, in the middle was yellow-ish cream cheese, and the top was covered in white cream. There was a bright red strawberry set on the very top.

Scooping up a bit, I brought it to my mouth. The soft sponge cake, cream cheese, and the lightly-sweetened white cream spread through my mouth... *Mmm, it's delicious!* I ate the rest in a daze.

"That's called cheesecake. I'm glad you like it."

Since I still had cake in my mouth, I just nodded. I was so happy...

Back at the Eucharis manor, I never would have thought about living like this. Not only did I get three meals, but I could eat sweets in the mornings and afternoons. I had my own maids, who took care of me all day. I was allowed to study, and I even got days off. At the end of the day, I could sleep in a fluffy bed. Sometimes I had to resist the urge to pinch my cheek, just to make sure it wasn't a dream.

I was being treated so well as a guest of honor now, but I wondered if I'd have to go back to that house once my Skill research was over. *If I do go back, will I end up being starved and whipped again?* Thinking about things I'd been avoiding thinking of, I shook my head.

"Is something wrong?" Lord Glen asked, giving me a worried look.

...That's right! I was having a tea party with Lord Glen right now!

"It's nothing."

He went quiet for a while, putting a hand to his mouth and looking at me. "If you're worried about anything, you can always talk to me. If it's something you don't want me to know, you can talk to your maids instead. Don't hold things in."

“Thank you,” I replied, eating my last bite of cake.

Once we finished eating and were drinking our tea, Lord Glen corrected his posture. “I actually invited you here because I wanted to ask something of you.”

“Ask something of me...?” I tilted my head, unsure of what he could ask of me. He signaled for the maid to leave, so we wouldn’t be heard. *It must be something important.* Thinking that, I corrected my posture, too.

“It’s about your Skill...” he started, looking straight at me. “Your Skill lets you create any seed you wish for. When you made the Origin Spirit Tree seed, you realized that you could create whatever you wanted, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“...You could even create seeds that could kill people.”

“Like poisonous plants?”

He gave me a small nod.

When I created the palm seed just from looking at my book, I realized something. My guide book was full of edible plants, but there were also plants that it said were “poisonous raw, but edible after cooking.” I’d done my best not to think of it, but...I really could make poisonous plants if I wanted.

“I’ll be straight with you. If you wanted to, you could create seeds that could just pump out poison. You could easily kill someone with them. If you weren’t careful, you might even destroy a whole country.”

A chill ran down my spine at his words, and I muttered, “I would never...”

I tried to deny it, but he continued, never taking his eyes off me, “Could you say the same if you were sent back to the Eucharis manor after your Skill research is finished?”

My eyes went wide with shock. I was fine now. I was happy living like I was, so the thought never occurred to me of killing anyone or destroying any nations. *But, what if I went back to that house...? What if I went back to those days of abuse...?*

“I...” My mind went blank. I couldn’t say that I wouldn’t. Before I realized it, I was gripping my fists so hard that my nails were digging into my skin.

“I told you that I had something to ask of you, right?”

I nodded, lips still sealed shut. It was then that I remembered the Mana Sealing Bracelet that got put on Lady Margaret. He was probably going to ask me to let him put one on me to seal my mana after my Skill research was over. Once it was sealed, they wouldn’t have to worry about me making any bad seeds anymore... I looked downwards, unable to look him in the face.

“What I want to ask of you is for a promise that you’ll never create any bad seeds.”

“...Huh?”

“In exchange, I’ll make sure you’re completely protected. Once your Skill research is over, I’ll make it so that you can stay at the Royal Research Institute as a researcher.”

I hadn’t expected that. I slowly looked up, only to see Lord Glen giving me his usual gentle smile.

“Then, I’ll get a noble family that will treasure you to adopt you.”

“You...aren’t going to seal my mana?” I asked.

Lord Glen gave me a funny look. “Why would we seal your mana when you haven’t done anything wrong? You haven’t made a single bad seed yet. Really, you’ve just created good seeds, like quick-growing plants, and the Origin Spirit Tree seed. If we sealed people’s mana on the basis that they *might* do something bad, we’d have to seal everyone’s.”

That was true.

“But we would have to seal it if you said you’d create some bad ones, of course.” He gave me a bitter little smile before patting the back of my head again. “You said you wouldn’t, so I’m going to believe you.”

I felt my chest heating up.

“But will my father and Lady Medisina agree to let me become a researcher?”

“Don’t worry, I’ll make it happen. So, can you do what I asked?”

“Yes, of course! I’ll never make any bad seeds!” I declared, sitting up straight before bowing deeply to him.

9. The Duke's Request

After I promised Lord Glen that I wouldn't make any bad seeds, there was a period of time where nothing happened. We kept having our morning mana pool-growing tea parties, but since we'd gone through most of the already-named sweets, the head chef had started making brand-new types. And as I ate and gave my thoughts on each sweet, I was taught table manners.

Lately, after we'd eaten, I'd been learning cultural things like the founding of the kingdom and what products were harvested where. Sometimes Ele would appear, and tell us about the first Origin Spirit Tree before it was burned, as well as the spirit world that was on the other side of our world. And of course, I never forgot to give Kitten Ele a good petting.

In the afternoon was my Skill research. I would make the seeds Lord Tris would ask for. They'd range from rare medicinal plants and hard to acquire spices, to improved versions of crops that were cultivated in Chronowize. Lately, thanks to my growing mana pool, I'd been able to make up to twenty seeds a day.

What else... Oh! I've been able to eat more! Which meant that I was finally filling out... Probably. You could still see my ribs poking up a bit, but they were less visible than before, I think.

On our day off, I went into town for the first time in my life, and went shopping. I learned how to use money, too. I bought decorative buttons for both Gina and Martha as thanks for all they did for me, and they were really happy. I'd also started learning how to dance. Because I'd been practicing curtseying every day, I hadn't been messing up and kneeling on the floor as much.

And while my happy days without having to fear whippings continued, an attractive older man with graying hair and a gaunt-faced man came to see me.

"A pleasure to meet you, miss. My name is Rodrick Bazrack, younger brother of the former king and current Duke Bazrack. This is Monroe, an authority on pharmacology," the Duke introduced himself, and gestured to Lord Monroe behind him with his chin.

Lord Monroe himself hesitantly gave me a little bow. Lord Tris, who had brought them along, quickly moved to stand by Lord Glen and me, whispering to us so softly that I could barely hear, "The Duke came to see the Chief with a letter of introduction from the King."

Hearing that, Lord Glen moved between Duke Bazrack and I. By “miss,” he must mean me. I was nervous, having never spoken to someone this important before.

“My name is Chelsea, daughter of Baron Eucharis,” I said, trying my best not to shake as I curtsied.

But then, the Duke gave me an intense look. *Maybe I messed up on my greeting...* As I started to feel faint from the stress and nervousness, his intense look morphed into a terribly upset, nearly crying one.

“Please... Please save my granddaughter!” he howled, suddenly bowing deeply before me.

Someone as high-ranked as a Duke, and the younger brother of the former king, is bowing to me!? I was so shocked, I looked to both Lord Glen and Lord Tris for help.

Taking a step back to stand by my side, Lord Glen rubbed my back. “Please, stop bowing. It’s troubling Chelsea,” he said to the Duke, who stood up again. “Let’s hear what you need, first.”

Thanks to him, we got through the introductions to hear their purpose for being here. But unfortunately, we only had one three-seater sofa in my lab, so we had to move to the parlor within the Research Institute. Inside, I sat on one sofa between Lord Glen and Lord Tris, while Duke Bazrack and Lord Monroe each sat on single sofas. Even from here, we could still see the Spirit Tree outside.

After the maids served us tea and left, Duke Bazrack began speaking, “My granddaughter is sick, and we’ve been told she only has three months left.”

I was taken aback to hear such a serious story from him, but Lord Glen didn’t even bat an eye. If the Duke was the former king’s brother, then his granddaughter was of royal blood too. Lord Tris looked like his soul might have left his body.

“One of the ingredients of the medicine that could cure her are some very hard to acquire flower petals. We’ve searched high and low, but the forecast looks grim. His Majesty, my nephew, told me about you, Miss Chelsea, and...” Duke Bazrack trailed off sorrowfully, looking straight at me. “I’ve heard that you can create any seed you wish for with your Skill, and that not only have all your seeds budded, but they’ve grown much quicker than normal as well. I beg of you, please, make a seed of the flower we need!”

I had no idea how to respond, so I looked to Lord Glen beside me.

“Chelsea isn’t used to meetings like this, so I’ll answer for her,” he told them, having noticed my gaze. He gave me his usual soft smile as he did. “At the moment, she needs to know about the seed before she can create it. Do you have any materials on it?”

Nodding, the Duke looked towards Lord Monroe, the pharmacology expert. The haggard man nervously pulled a few papers

from his bag, setting them on the table. "Here are the documents detailing the flower seed."

On the papers were illustrations of the seed and sprout from various angles, how it grew, the leaves and stalk, and the flower in various circumstances—along with lots of notes. The plant was strange in that the flower only bloomed once a year, on the night of a full moon in the middle of winter, and that there was absolutely nothing medicinal about any other part of the plant. The only usable part of the flower were its vibrant petals. But since they couldn't be used if they were dried, they were very hard to get.

As I looked over the documents, I saw a note labeling it as "poisonous." I felt my heart thump. I'd just promised Lord Glen, so I wouldn't be able to make any "poisonous" seeds.

"As you can see, the flower petals can be both poisonous or medicinal... In order for the Lady's illness to be healed, they are absolutely necessary. As well...they can also cause loss of vision, and may paralyze parts of the body," Lord Monroe explained, facing downward.

"Side effects, huh..." muttered Lord Glen.

"I'm well aware that she could go blind or be paralyzed, but if her life can be saved, I'd like her to take the medicine. You are our only hope, Miss Chelsea! Please, make a fast-growing seed for my granddaughter!" Duke Bazrack cried, bowing once again. After that, he kept bowing, never raising his head.

A poison that could cause loss of vision, but was also medicinal... Would that be a bad seed, or a good seed?

While I worried about whether or not I should make the seed, Lord Tris whispered in a voice too low for the Duke to hear, "I don't want you to make any poisonous seeds..."

Glancing over to him, I saw that his usual smile had been replaced with a serious expression. ...*He must be worried.* Looking over to Lord Glen, he gave me a nod. It seemed that he was agreeing with Lord Tris, but I didn't think the Duke would leave until I agreed. *What should I do...?*

As I worried about how to respond, I could see the Spirit Tree glitter outside, and Ele appeared in his kitten form beside my feet.

«I've been listening... Why are you worrying?» he asked from the floor by my feet, lifting his little paws in a demand to be picked up. «With your Skill, you could make the flower seed easily, correct?»

I shook my head before lifting him onto my lap.

«So you are worrying about whether you want to make the seed or not. How hard-headed. Your Skill allows you to create whatever seed you wish for. If it's poisonous, why not just wish to create one with no poison?»

I blinked at his words. *My Skill is to create any seed I wished for.*

“That’s right... I can just wish for a seed with no poison...” I whispered, only to feel Lord Glen and Lord Tris’ eyes on me.

“That’s a great idea. You’ll have to look closely at the documents to make sure there are no other side effects that could pop up,” Lord Glen said, nodding.

“Then, you could wish for a seed without those side effects!” cried Lord Tris excitedly.

I nodded. “I’ll make the seed for you.”

Hearing my response, Duke Bazrack slowly straightened himself out. “Thank you so much...” he said, giving me another bow.

After that, we looked over the documentation again, and discussed what kind of seed to make.

“It looks like there’s nothing poisonous or medicinal in the seed itself, or the leaves or stem.”

“Then that means keeping the seed in the same candy-like shape as the original.” Nodding at Lord Glen’s words, Lord Tris started drawing the seed on a new piece of paper.

“The stalk is grass-like, and the leaves are about as big as my palm...” I said, and he drew the stalk and leaves as well. “Next is the flower.”

Lord Monroe suddenly spoke up, “If I may, why not increase the number of petals, as well?”

“Why?”

“If we have extra petals, on the chance there is an accident such as a mistake in the compounding, we would still be able to create the medicine.”

He was right. The petals were only one ingredient in the medicine.

“Let’s make it with lots of petals, just like a double blossom rose,” I suggested, thinking back to something I’d seen in the rose garden.

With that said, we wrote down all the details on the medicinal petals, making sure to write how it wasn’t poisonous, as well.

“Okay, our blueprint is finished,” Lord Tris said as he set down his pen.

I looked over the blueprint for the new flower seed over and over again, before nodding. “I’ll make a non-poisonous seed — [Seed Creation].”

A bright red, candy-like seed plopped down on top of the blueprint.

“Oooohhh!” both the Duke and Lord Monroe cried out in surprise as it appeared.

Lord Glen looked closely at the new seed before shaking his head. “I’ve appraised it, but it’s neither medicinal or poisonous. You might

have wished too hard to get rid of the poison...”

I *had* been wishing extra hard for that. “I-I’ll try again — [Seed Creation]!”

Another candy-like red seed rolled onto the blueprint, but Lord Glen shook his head. I started reading the blueprint over again and again, and tried a few more tries, only to get more useless seeds.

“That’s strange. You’re supposed to be able to make any seed you wish for. Ah... Maybe it’s because you’re specifying ‘a non-poisonous seed?’” Lord Tris frowned.

I thought back to when he’d first taught me to cast my Skill after verbally saying what I wanted. *Which means that what I should be saying is...*

“I’ll make the seed exactly as specified in Lord Tris’ blueprint — [Seed Creation]!”

This time when I cast it, a blue candy-like seed dropped down. I quickly looked to Lord Glen, who nodded.

“My appraisal says it has no side effects... And no poison.”

“Thank goodness!” I said, happily clasping my hands together. Everyone in the room celebrated.

Lord Glen pulled out a small box from somewhere, carefully placed the blue seed inside, then handed it to Duke Bazrack.

“Thank you... I won’t forget what you’ve done for me,” the Duke smiled before leaving the parlor with Lord Monroe.

+ + +

A few days later...

“Ah, that’s right. I was told to tell you something,” said Lord Glen suddenly while we were making seeds in the afternoon. “Duke Bazrack’s granddaughter was healed with no complications like going blind or being paralyzed thanks to you, Chelsea.”

“Really? That’s great...”

Lord Glen had told me that he’d appraised that I’d made a poisonless seed, but I’d been so worried I might have somehow messed up. It was relieving to hear that everything went alright.

“How wonderful!” Lord Tris cheered, raising both of his hands in the air.

Seemingly having heard us, the Spirit Tree sparkled, and Ele appeared. «Fufufu! It was thanks to my help! You may worship me, now!»

Seeing him stand proudly in his kitten form was so cute.

“It was thanks to you, Ele! Thank you!” I said with a smile, only for him to suddenly crouch down and cover his face with his paws. “What’s wrong?”

“He’s probably just embarrassed,” laughed Lord Glen.

“Really!?” Hearing that, Lord Tris started carefully observing the spirit. When he noticed, Ele tried to charge at him, but he was easily caught.

«I-I am a Spirit! Worship me!»

His voice was strained, so he must have really been embarrassed. *But Ele, Lord Tris can't hear you when you're in kitten form...* I watched them while I silently whispered that.

Interlude 6: Glen and Marx

That day, the son of Margrave Sargent, Marx, had come to speak to me in the castle.

“Prince Glenarnold, I’m pleased to see you in good health...”

“Marx, drop the formalities,” I responded with a frown, only to get a big smile in return.

This man was the Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights, but he was always sniffing out unpleasant incidents and reporting them to me. I’d asked him if he’d want to move to the Intelligence Division, but he’d refused with a grin, saying he wouldn’t be able to learn anything then.

“This is about Miss Chelsea, the girl with the brand-new Skill.”

About Chelsea? I should really pay attention this time, then.

“Your Highness, how much do you know about Miss Chelsea?”

“I know she was abused at Baron Eucharis’ manor before coming to the Royal Research Institute; absolutely sure, from her stunted growth and wounds at the time. Other than that, I know that the Noble Registry lists her and Margaret as twins, with their mother being the illegitimate child of Marquis Ackroyd.”

I must have answered just as he wished, because his usual smile changed to a smirk. “If you know that much, then I’ll start with the conclusion.”

I nodded at him to continue.

“Miss Chelsea is the daughter of the Baron’s first wife, Lady Sophia, not his second wife, Medisina. Which means...”

“Chelsea and Margaret aren’t twins, but sisters from different mothers.”

“That’s correct. And just as you said before, they’re fraudulently listed as twins and the daughters of Medisina in the Noble Registry.”

“And reporting false information to the Noble Registry is a grave crime here.”

Skills are incredibly important not only here in Chronowize, but all over the world. And nobles tended to awaken to higher rank Skills. In order to keep those high ranked Skill users in the country, and to use them properly, they were all to be listed in detail in the Noble Registry, including illegitimate children.

“I’ve got statements from not only the midwife present at Miss Chelsea’s birth, but from two maids who had been employed at the

time, and also neighboring residents.”

“So how did Sophia die?”

“Blood loss during childbirth. And for that, I have statements from both the midwife and the priest who confirmed her death.”

Marx’s demeanor went through another change, becoming more tense and serious.

“It turns out that Lady Sophia, the first wife, was actually the youngest daughter of the former Margrave Sargent... My aunt. She’d left the house long before, married before we knew it, and we’d been told she’d died early without having any children. But when I found out that a girl nearly identical to her had been abused by her family... Oh, I’m so excited for how my grandparents and parents are going to react to that,” he said, chuckling like a demon.

While I, personally, would have no problem letting them loose on the Eucharis barony, the Sargent Margraviate was located beside the demonic forest in the middle of the continent to stop the monsters from reaching the rest of the country. Thus, everyone who lived there was very strong. *If they did let loose, it wouldn’t end in only a few deaths... I would prefer to finish things without bloodshed, but...*

“Who was responsible for recording the false information?” I asked.

“Baron Barnard Eucharis and his second wife’s father, Marquis Ackroyd, along with a few officials managing the Registry.”

“But the second wife, Medisina herself, wasn’t involved?”

With a scowl on his face, Marx replied, “Not in the false registration, no. But she did abuse Chelsea for years...”

“Whatever the case, we’ll drag them all down and have them charged.”

My brother, the King, had already agreed to let me do as I wished with them. Now that I had all the underlying information, I could finally start.

10. An Audience With His Majesty

Because I'd saved Duke Bazrack's granddaughter's life, I was to have an audience with His Majesty the King. I was nervous that there'd be a big rush if I was meeting the most important person in the kingdom, but it was in ten days, not immediately. *Why does it have to be that far away?* While I was thinking that, Gina came in with a woman I didn't know.

"I've called an instructor to teach you etiquette. You need to practice before your audience with the King."

The teacher gave me a wonderful curtsy before smiling brightly. I tried to give her one back, but she looked troubled. *She can tell how bad I am just from that, huh...* They'd never let me see the King like this. Which must've been why they'd given me ten extra days to practice.

From that day on, my Skill research was put on hold while my days were filled with etiquette lessons. Not only did I learn how to curtsy like a proper noble, but I also learned how to walk and how to sweep the hem of my dress. I practiced it all over and over again. Thanks to that, I was finally able to curtsy properly! I was so happy to finally get praise from my teacher.

+ + +

On the day of my audience with the King, the maids started cleaning me up early in the morning. They worked even harder than they had when I had my tea party with Lord Glen in the garden. The gown I was wearing today was one I got from Duke Bazrack as thanks for saving his granddaughter. I was relieved that I didn't have to pick one out by myself. It was made of some rarely-used glossy light purple fabric, and it managed to make even me look fancy, despite my height!

"It's like I'm the daughter of a noble..."

"Lady Chelsea, you've always been the daughter of a noble!" Martha chimed in after I whispered to myself.

I knew I was technically the daughter of Baron Eucharis, but unlike my sister Lady Margaret, I'd never been able to wear anything as nice as this, so I'd never felt like it.

After they put some light makeup on me, they finally got to accessories, but... The earrings, necklace, and bracelet were all made

with a stone called spinel which was the same color as the dress. I was shocked that they were all shinier than anything I'd ever seen before.

"What if I accidentally drop something..."

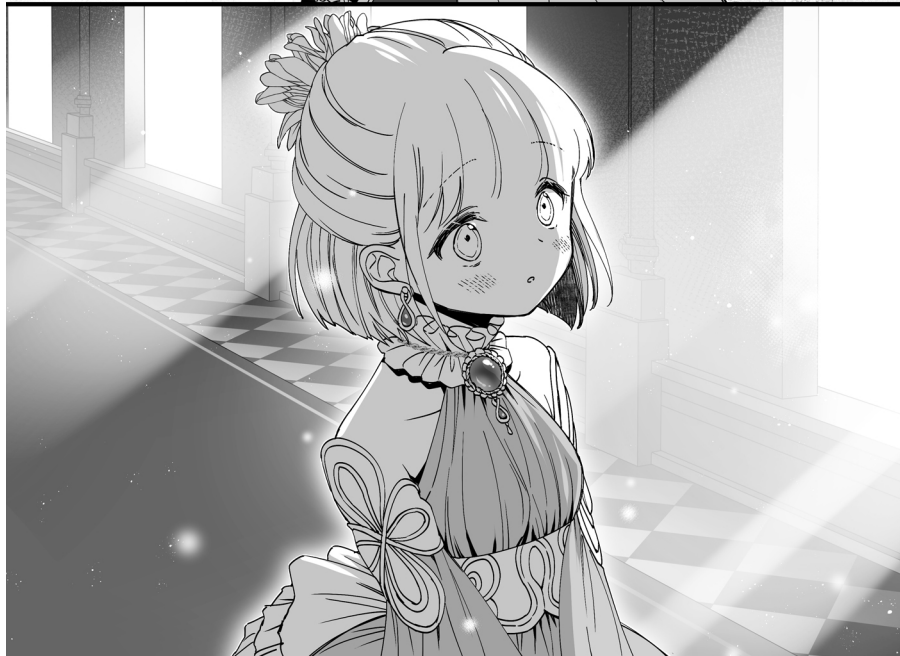
"Don't worry. If that ever happened, a knight would pick it up for you." This time it was Gina who responded to my muttering.

Even if it'd get picked up, I still definitely don't want to drop them! I was so worried that I would have preferred not to wear them at all, but since they were gifts from Duke Bazrack, it would be rude not to.

Once I was all ready, Lord Glen came to get me. Unlike his usual attire, he had a big decorative white cloth under his collar. His dark purple cloak and decorated jacket must have been his formal clothes. Behind him stood a few knights.

"You look cute in whatever you wear," he complimented me, taking my hand with a soft smile.

"T-Thank you." I usually felt like he treated me like a kid, but for some reason, I didn't this time. *Ah, I can feel my cheeks getting hot!* I was probably as red as an apple. Embarrassed, I looked downwards.



Apparently, he was going to stay with me through the whole audience, because he was worried I'd faint from the stress. He'd gotten permission from the King himself, too... I had no idea how he managed that. *Maybe he's secretly a super high-ranking noble.*

When we stood in front of a big black-painted door, it slowly opened. I walked in just as my etiquette teacher had taught me, standing straight and being careful not to make any sounds. The audience chamber was about the size of my lab, but much taller. In the far center of the room was a chair that somehow looked both extravagant and subdued. *That must be the King's throne.*

Lord Glen and I stopped around the middle of the chamber. It was full of knights and high-ranking nobles. Once the second afternoon bell rang, His Majesty entered. I bowed my head. The air seemed still. I could hear the crunching of carpet as he walked, and the thump when he sat on his throne.

"Raise your head."

Huh? In the briefing session, I'd been told to wait for the prime minister to call on me before lifting my head, but...the voice I heard was directly in front of me.

Looking up, I saw a man with long dark blue hair and blue eyes giving me a sour look. *Our eyes met!?* Surprised, I looked downwards again.

"So you're Chelsea."

His words froze me to the core. My heart was pounding, and I was getting dizzy. About when I started to feel faint, I heard Lord Glen's voice.

"Your Majesty... I don't think you need to use your [Overpower] Skill here," he said, *very* frankly.

Is that okay!? I thought. I glanced over to him, only to see him acting completely normally. Looking at the knights and prime minister, they were all as close to fainting as I was.

"I wanted to see if it'd work on you, Glen, but I guess not," the King said, grinning at him before switching back to his sour face.

The moment he did, the faintness and chill disappeared. As I breathed a sigh of relief, His Majesty gave the prime minister a signal with his chin. From then on, just as the briefing had said, the prime minister spoke to me.

First, I got praised for saving Duke Bazrack's, the younger brother of the former king's, granddaughter's life. *Really* praised. Enough that my face was burning from embarrassment.

As thanks for my achievement, I was to become a research fellow for the country. As a research fellow, I would wear a white robe with a purple stole. And for as long as I was a minor, I would live in the

same room at the lodging house. Once I was an adult, they would prepare another place for me within the citadel. Other than that, I'd get paid even more than now, and get more maids... Also, I'd be getting a special garden within the citadel grounds for my Skill. They gave me a list of precautions, too.

Once he finished talking, I was to sign three pages of parchment. When I went to check what they were for, the prime minister gave me an explanation.

"The first page is an agreement to become a research fellow for the country. The second is an agreement in regards to the precautions I just mentioned about your personal garden. The third is to have you adopted into the Sargent Margraviate."

...Huh? What was that last part!? My eyes widened in shock, but he just continued.

"Please sign all three pages. The first two should be signed as 'Chelsea Sargent,' while the last only needs your given name."

I slowly looked over to Lord Glen beside me. He gave me a smile as if to say his prank succeeded, before giving me a strong nod. *Ah, that's right.* He said that in exchange for me promising not to make any bad seeds, he'd make sure I could stay at the Research Institute as a researcher and be adopted into another noble family.

But...isn't it a little mean to have me find this out in front of the king of all people!? My little bit of anger at him managed to wash away my nervousness. Using the opportunity, I signed all three of the papers. It was helpful, because I thought I'd been shaking too much to be able to write properly.

When I finished signing all three, the prime minister handed them to the king. And as soon as he did, His Majesty's sour look changed back into a smile.

Hm? Is it just me, or does he look a lot like Lord Glen? His hair and eye color were exactly the same. Looking between them in wonder, His Majesty suddenly burst out laughing.

"Don't we look alike?"

I wasn't sure if I was actually allowed to respond verbally, so I nodded.

The king's smile only deepened. "Glen is my much younger little brother."

"Huh!?"

"You didn't have to tell her here..." My head darted to look at Lord Glen beside me, who was scowling with a huge sigh. He might not have wanted me to know. I was much more surprised about learning he was the king's younger brother than I was to be adopted. *Wait, forget that, was I...!?*

"H-Have I been disrespectful to you, Lord Gle—Your Highness!?" I

was so shocked, I couldn't stop the words from leaving my mouth.

"You haven't been disrespectful in the least. And please, don't call me 'Your Highness.'"

"A-Alright, Lord Glen..."

"Oh, I should mention this too. Soon, we'll be calling your *recorded* birth parents for an audience. Ask Glen for the details," His Majesty told me before exiting the chamber with the prime minister.

Father and Lady Medisina are coming here...? Having heard that, I thought back to one of the rare times my father had come home...

...Lady Medisina had ordered me to stay in the shed and to lock the door. Since I'd be whipped as punishment if I left, all I could do was sit there. Then, my father came to the shed.

"Chelsea, why are you hiding in a shed? Come out," he ordered in a cold voice, much to my terror. I was so scared that I was about to come out, before I heard Lady Medisina's voice.

"That girl is too rebellious. Once she comes out, I'll make sure to discipline her accordingly."

My heart squeezed painfully. Father had told me to come out, but I'd be whipped by Lady Medisina if I did... I just wrapped myself in my thin cloth blanket and waited.

Once Father left again for work, Lady Medisina disciplined me by whip. Not only the whip this time...but also throwing things and kicking me, so much that I was worried I'd die.

Remembering the fear I felt then, I was terrified now. *If they come to the castle, they might whip and abuse me again, just like at home...*

"Chelsea? You've gone pale. Let's get you back to your room."

Feeling faint again, I did my best to nod to Lord Glen before he took me back to my room.

+ + +

The next day, I was still as white as a ghost. I could barely eat any of my breakfast. Gina and Martha were worried, and tried to speak to me, but their words just went in one ear and out the other. I knew in my head that I couldn't stay like this, but my heart didn't agree.

Lord Tris came and escorted me to my lab while I was still feeling awful. He looked like he wanted to say something as we walked in, but headed off to the fields anyway. As soon as Lord Glen saw me, he pulled me over to the couch. While I sat there, staring into space, the Spirit Tree outside sparkled and Kitten Ele appeared.

«You don't seem well. What's wrong?»

I opened my mouth, before closing it again and shaking my head.

«It's alright if you don't want to talk,» he said, rubbing against my

legs. I picked him up and put him on my lap, and he curled up as usual.

I knew everyone was worried about me, but I just couldn't help it. While I gave a big sigh, there was a knock on the door. I thought it'd be Gina or Martha pushing their carts in for our mana pool-growing tea time, but the person who stepped in was the son of Margrave Sargent and Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights, Lord Marx. He was carrying a box.

"I called him, thinking you should meet again," Lord Glen explained before sitting beside me.

"Reintroducing myself, Miss—no, just Chelsea, now—I'm Marx, your new older brother. This is a celebratory gift from your new parents... The current Margrave Sargent and his wife," Lord Marx said, giving me both a big smile and the box.

"...Thank you," I responded, still depressed, before opening the box. Inside was a big brooch; in the middle was a sword-like emblem.

"That's the Sargent Margraviate's emblem. That's proof you're now part of our family. Keep it safe."

The Sargent Margraviate's emblem...? That's right! I wasn't the daughter of Baron Eucharis anymore. I was officially adopted by Margrave Sargent. While I looked at the brooch in awe, Lord Glen patted my head from his spot beside me.

"We've got something to tell you, gloomy Chelsea," he said.

I nodded at him to go on.

"We've done some investigating, and we've learned that Medisina isn't your birth mother."

"Eh!?"

"Your real birth mother is the current Margrave Sargent's younger sister, Sophia. On the other hand, Margaret is Medisina's daughter."

My jaw dropped, and all I could do was blink.

To think, my mother isn't who I thought... Then that explained the difference in treatment between Lady Margaret and me. My hair color wasn't at all similar to either Father or Lady Medisina, or even her father Marquis Ackroyd. I didn't look like any of them. I'd been told it was a mutation, but it was because my mother was a different woman!

As I nodded to myself, Lord Marx kneeled directly in front of me, looking into my eyes.

"That means your new parents are really your uncle and aunt, and we're cousins. You can call me brother, now."

Lord Marx... No, Brother said that with another smile. I was shocked into silence, but Lord Glen gave me a gentle smile, too.

"It looks like you're feeling a bit better. Let's call everyone in," he said, standing to ring the bell on the table. When he did, both Gina and Martha came in pushing carts, and Lord Tris followed behind

them. Gina put the white cloth over the table, while Martha covered the tables with sweets and drinks.

Once they were finished, Lord Glen spoke again, “Looks like it’s done, so let’s sit down.”

Taking my hand, he led me to my usual cushioned seat. Right before my eyes, I saw a round cake as big as my head for the first time. On top of it was a chocolate plate that said “Congratulations!”

“I thought we’d celebrate you becoming a research fellow today,” he told me, seeing my surprise.

Lord Tris and my new brother sat in the empty chairs. Ele stayed on the sofa in his kitten form.

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you,” I replied, still not quite there yet as I looked around at everyone. Lord Glen’s smile was even gentler than usual, while Lord Tris and Brother grinned happily. Gina and Martha were clapping for me from their spot by the wall without making any noise.

Ele looked at my face before giving a little nod. «You look as if you’re feeling a bit better, now,» I heard him say.

“Let’s eat!”

At Lord Glen’s words, I said my thanks to the earth god before starting to eat. I hadn’t been able to eat breakfast, but I could get things down now. After eating a little piece of cake, I bit into the chocolate plate. *Ah! That wasn’t good manners, was it!? I looked over to Gina and Martha, who gave me strained smiles.*

“Oh, I forgot to mention. As a research fellow for the nation, you’re just about the same status as royalty.”

Royalty... So I’m just as highly-ranked as Lord Glen is as the King’s brother!?

“While it was originally only while you were here with your new Skill, now you’ll always be that status.”

“Yeah. Becoming a research fellow is super amazing! I actually wanted to give you an even bigger party!”

“The Second Order of Knights will be able to protect you freely from now on. I’m glad.”

Lord Glen, Lord Tris, and Brother all spoke up.

I thought to myself as I ate my flan after my cake... Now I was both the daughter of Margrave Sargent, *and* a research fellow. My father and Lady Medisina were coming to the castle soon, but since my status is different now, they couldn’t whip me, right? It’d be strange for them to discipline someone from another family. They might say bad things, but if it wasn’t physically painful, I could handle it. *It might not be as bad as I thought..*

The moment that thought crossed my mind, my mood brightened. *There are people who are nice to me—who protect me—who worry about*

me! Swallowing the bite of flan, I nodded to myself.

11. I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

A little while after I was adopted into the Sargent Margraviate, Father and Lady Medisina were called to the royal palace. They'd been called by the king, but apparently hadn't been told why. Knowing Lady Medisina, she would probably be thinking that I, the useless child, had done something wrong. They weren't immediately brought to the audience chamber, but instead to another room where Lady Margaret and I were waiting. The one who brought them there was Brother Marx, the Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights. After he brought them in, he stood against the wall, looking completely innocent. Father had a vacant look in his eyes, and I couldn't help but wonder why.

As per a suggestion from Lord Glen, I was wearing a simple dress, like the common people would wear. He wanted to get as much information out of them before the audience as possible, so he had me dress similarly to how I did at home. Lady Margaret was wearing her black uniform and gray robe as a control trainee.

The first person to speak was Lady Medisina. She started ranting at me, completely ignoring her surroundings, "The reason the King called us is because you've made some careless mistake, isn't it? You really are trash!"

I could see Brother's face morph into a scowl. I just did my best to stay silent and face down.

"But my lovely Margaret is as excellent as ever. That's the robe that control trainees wear, isn't it?" Lady Medisina continued, smiling happily at Lady Margaret.

"Yes, this is the robe for control trainees. The researchers all wear white robes with different colored stoles."

Huh? I could hear a slight waver in Lady Margaret's voice. She might be thinking that they'd been called due to her behavior. No matter what the reason, the fact that a control trainee like her had attacked someone with a brand new Skill, who was being treated as a guest of honor, wouldn't disappear. She might have been regretting it.

"And you. You aren't wearing a gray robe like Margaret. My, my! You're trash here as well? Who do you think is paying for you to attend this place? Us, that's who! A good-for-nothing like you is just a waste of money," Lady Medisina groaned, heaving a big sigh as she

did. "Cease your control training and have your mana sealed already. Then, you'll be able to come home and live as you were before."

Live as I was before... She meant get up before dawn, put on my rags, clean the manor without a single word of praise, be whipped as "discipline," and starved. I grit my teeth to pump myself up, before raising my head.

"I...will never set foot in any house with you again." I didn't yell or get angry. I just tried my best to say it calmly.

I had learned a lot since coming to the Royal Research Institute. People were nice to me and worried about my well-being... Unlike anyone at home. Who would want to go back to a place like that? I'd created a seed for a medicinal flower that saved Duke Bazrack's granddaughter, who had royal blood. Thanks to that, I'd become a research fellow, nearly as high a status as royalty. I was also adopted into the Sargent Margraviate. The Eucharis Barony wasn't where I would go home to, anymore.

Not expecting me to refuse, Lady Medisina's eyes widened in shock before her face morphed in rage.

"Why is a failure like *you* talking back!?" She quickly walked towards me, raising her hand to hit me. But Father stopped her. I hadn't expected that, so my jaw nearly dropped.

"I've told you before. Don't raise your hand against a child," he chided her, eyes still blank.

Huh... I feel like I've heard this before...

Back when I was small, before I added "Lady" to Lady Medisina and Lady Margaret's names, Father had stepped in when I was about to be hit. Now that I thought about it, he was rarely ever home, but when he was, I was never whipped.

"O-Oh, Barnard. This is discipline. It's her fault for not listening to her mother," Lady Medisina said, giving him a bright smile as she pulled her hand back.

"And Chelsea isn't here as a control trainee, but as someone who awakened to a brand-new Skill. The Institute is paying for all of her living expenses. You've been getting paid as well, haven't you...?"

I nodded at Father's words.

"What!?" Lady Medisina's eyes sparkled. "If you're getting paid, you don't have to come home. Keep working here and send all your pay home!"

"I refuse."

I was no longer the daughter of Baron Eucharis. If I was sending any pay home, it would be to the Sargent Margraviate.

My second refusal put Lady Medisina over the edge, and she started screaming, "Don't kid yourself! Who do you think it was that raised you!? I deserve for you to at least pay me back for that!"

This time, it was the knights who held her back from hitting me, not Father. As they were restraining her, someone knocked on the door. As it opened, Lord Glen and the Prime Minister stepped inside.

“Your voice is echoing into the halls, Madam. But is it not unthinkable to want someone you abused so severely to repay you?” Lord Glen said, chuckling, but his eyes weren’t laughing at all.

Lady Medisina’s face went bright red as she glared at him, screeching, “What does a mere Appraiser like you know!?”

He might be a nationally-recognized Appraiser, but he’s also one of the highest-ranked people in the country, I thought.

“Ah, that’s right, I didn’t introduce myself properly last time we met. I’m Glenarnold Snowflake. While I *am* a nationally-recognized Appraiser, I’m also the current Duke Snowflake. I’m also His Majesty, King AlexisKevin’s younger brother.”

The second she heard his name, Lady Medisina’s face went white as a sheet, and she began to shake. If he’d introduced himself as “Glenarnold,” even I would have known that he was the King’s younger brother. After all, the fact that “His Majesty the King loves his younger brother Prince Glenarnold very much” was incredibly well known, and even a commoner like the old gardener had heard about it.

“His Majesty is calling for you. Let’s head to the courtroom,” Lord Glen told Father and Lady Medisina with a cold smile.

Apparently, they’d be brought to judgment regarding the false Noble Registry records in front of the King. Father, Lady Medisina, and even Lady Margaret were escorted out of the room surrounded by knights.

“It’s time for your transformation, Chelsea.” This time, Lord Glen’s smile was gentle as he rang the bell on the table. A moment later, Gina, Martha, and my new other maids came in carrying things.

“Huh?”

Lord Glen just gave me a light wave as I was surprised, before leaving with the Prime Minister.

“Please excuse us!” Martha spoke first, and all the other maids nodded before stripping me of the simple common dress.

“I-I can take it off myself...!” It was so sudden that I squeaked the same way I had when I was first brought here.

“His Highness has told us that you will be there during the King’s judgment, as well, Lady Chelsea.”

“We’ve also heard that people who think little of you will be in attendance.”

“That means our job is to shine you up into a beauty.”

Gina and Martha said all that with a smile as they dressed me in the light purple dress that Duke Bazrack gave to me.

“Purple is the color of royalty, and nobles can only wear it if it’s given to them by a member of the royal family.”

“And Duke Bazrack, the former king’s younger brother, has gifted purple clothing to you.”

“If you wear this, it will tell them that you have ties to the royal family!”

They just kept dressing me up as I stood there, shocked. Light purple earrings, necklace, and bracelets. A big hair accessory. And on my chest, the brooch with the Sargent Margraviate’s emblem, a gift from my adopted parents. Finally, they finished off by putting on a light layer of makeup.

“Perfect!” Martha squealed proudly while the other maids all nodded.

As I looked in the mirror, I could see lots of purple, including my own eyes. The brooch on my chest showed that I was no longer the “failure” elder twin daughter of Baron Eucharis. I had never realized that getting dressed up could give you so much strength. No matter what happened in the courtroom, no matter what anyone said, I would do my best!

“Thank you all. I’ll get going!” I smiled, full of vigor as I left the room.

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In the courtroom, half of the room was filled with spectator’s seats, while the other half had a square box painted in the middle. I’d learn later that the box sealed mana just as the sealing bracelets did, so anyone inside couldn’t use Skills.

Inside the box were Baron Barnard Eucharis, his wife, Lady Medisina, and their daughter, Lady Margaret. Off to the right side of the room, against the wall, were seats for my adopted parents, the Sargent Margrave and his wife, Brother, and myself. On the opposite side sat Lord Glen and Lord Tris, Lady Medisina’s father, Marquis Ackroyd, and his wife.

After a short wait, the door on the far wall opened, and His Majesty and the Prime Minister walked inside. His Majesty sat down heavily in a chair in the center of the room, while the Prime Minister stood diagonally behind me.

“Before we begin, I have an announcement. Lady Chelsea has recently saved a life through use of a Skill other than [Cure], and as thanks, has been promoted to the rank of national research fellow.”

The spectator’s seats erupted in murmurs at the Prime Minister’s words. I stood, giving a perfect curtsy. Lady Medisina and Lady Margaret looked as if they couldn’t believe their eyes when they saw me. They were shocked, both to see me acting like a proper noble, and

to be head-to-toe in purple.

I'd changed since I came here to the Royal Research Academy. I was not the same girl who had been called "trash" and abused.

"In addition, she has been adopted by Margrave Sargent." When the Prime Minister continued, Marquis Ackroyd, who had been sitting along the opposite wall, shot to his feet.

"Why the Sargent Margraviate!?" he screamed, loud enough to echo through the whole room.

By the way, my new Father, Margrave Sargent was smiling cheerfully, while my new Mother took my hand and stroked it. I was embarrassed, having never been touched so gently by anyone but Lord Glen.

"Chelsea is my granddaughter! She should be adopted into my family, if anywhere!"

Marquis Ackroyd was breathing heavily through his nose as he raged, but His Majesty, the Prime Minister, and Lord Glen all shook their heads, sighing.

"I've taken care of you at the Eucharis manor before, haven't I? Now, Chelsea, come to me, right now!" He was saying the same kind of thing that his daughter Lady Medisina had said earlier.

"May I be permitted to speak?" I asked the Prime Minister behind me, and got a strong nod back. Staring straight at Marquis Ackroyd, I straightened my posture and spoke: "I refuse. Though I remember being kicked by you at the Eucharis manor, I have no recollection of you ever taking care of me."

Hearing my response, Marquis Ackroyd started shaking, red with rage. His wife must have realized, because she moved her chair away from his, giving him a cold look before looking resolute.

"We will explain later why Lady Chelsea was adopted into the Sargent Margraviate," the Prime Minister told Marquis Ackroyd, before signaling for me to sit, and moving to stand beside His Majesty.

And then... Their judgment began.

"While registering Lady Chelsea as the daughter of Margrave Sargent, the fact that fraudulent information was recorded in the Noble Registry came to light," the Prime Minister stated, looking at my former family.

Father's eyes were still blank, and he seemed to be staring into nothingness. Lady Medisina's face twitched, but she still acted haughtily.

"Recording fraudulent information into the Noble Registry is a grave crime in our country. With that as preamble, I will read the fraudulent entries."

Hearing this, Lady Medisina's demeanor changed. She looked towards her father, Marquis Ackroyd, opening and closing her mouth.

Could she not have known that it was a crime...?

“There are three incorrect points. Firstly, Lady Chelsea’s birthday is listed as two days from her true day of birth. Secondly, her true birth mother is the Baron’s first wife, daughter of the former Margrave Sargent, Lady Sophia. Lastly, Lady Chelsea and Lady Margaret are listed as twins, despite having different mothers.”

Lady Medisina looked downwards, unmoving as the Prime Minister continued.

“As the fraudulent passages were recorded at her birth, Lady Chelsea herself has no involvement in the act. Similarly, as she died in childbirth, Lady Sophia also has no involvement. The ones with reason to falsify the records are Lady Chelsea’s birth father, Baron Eucharis, his second wife, Baroness Medisina, and her father, Marquis Ackroyd.”

“What are you saying!? I had absolutely no involvement!” the Marquis denied, spraying spittle as he did.

“We have brought witnesses,” the Prime Minister announced, signaling for the knight at the entrance to open the door. Three people walked into the room and stood between the spectator’s seats and the square box, all bowing their heads.

The first one to speak was the chef from the Eucharis manor, who used to secretly feed me: “I am...was, until recently, the chef at the Eucharis manor. After Lady Medisina, the second wife, came to the manor, Lady Sophia, the first wife, was sent to live in a small shed on the property. I brought her food every day. She was always happily stroking her pregnant belly.”

The next up was the maid who served Lady Medisina. She was also the person who taught me how to read and do math: “I was Lady Sophia’s personal maid at the time of her death. After giving birth to Lady Chelsea, she passed away. A few days later, Lady Medisina gave birth to Lady Margaret in the manor. The day she gave birth, I saw her father speaking to the Master.”

The last one to speak was an old woman who I’d never seen before. She seemed very nervous: “I-I worked as a midwife for many years. Twelve years ago, I helped Lady Sophia birth Lady Chelsea, and a few days later, helped Lady Medisina birth Lady Margaret. After Lady Margaret’s birth, a man calling himself Marquis Ackroyd came, and I remember he looked closely at her. And also...my late husband worked at the Eucharis manor as a gardener. He was very worried about Lady Chelsea’s circumstances.”

So she was the old gardener’s wife!? It was thanks to him that I was able to live somewhat like a normal human. I was so thankful for his kindness. As I looked at the woman silently, she gave me a smile.

“Do you have any objections?”

“I went to see my granddaughter, nothing more!” Marquis

Ackroyd cried, only for his wife, who had been sitting beside him, to get up and slap him across the face.

“So it was a lie that you cut contact with her.”

Marquis Ackroyd shut his mouth tightly, scowling as he sat back down.

“Please forgive my shameful display,” his wife said before sitting back beside him.

The Prime Minister turned his gaze on Father.

“I’ll tell you all that I know,” my birth father said, lowering his head.

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To begin at the conclusion, Lady Margaret and I had been registered as twins due to Marquis Ackroyd’s insinuations that he would cut off his assistance to the Eucharis Barony otherwise.

The Marquis himself turned out to not have become the Marquis by blood, but by marrying into the family, and Lady Medisina was born between him and a commoner. Though he was the current head of the family, he had no blood connection to them, and had been ordered by his wife to cut off contact with Lady Medisina and her mother. But rather than cut her off, the Marquis spoiled her. As it was, Lady Medisina would live as a commoner, despite having noble blood.

At the same time, Mother and Father had been married for three years, but had yet to be blessed with a child. That was why the Marquis came to offer Baron Eucharis Lady Medisina’s hand in marriage. After my parents discussed it, it was decided that Lady Medisina would become his second wife. Marquis Ackroyd was happy that his daughter would be able to live as a noble. And through his assistance to the Baron, he would be able to see Lady Medisina...

A year later, both my Mother and Lady Medisina became pregnant at the same time, and gave birth around the same time as well. In noble families, the eldest child would be the heir. In the case of twins, since they were born almost at the same time, it was normal for the twin with the most skill to be named as heir.

Because I was born just two days earlier, I would be the heir to the Barony. That would mean that if Lady Margaret didn’t marry a noble, she’d end up as a commoner. Unable to accept that though he had managed to make his daughter Medisina into a noble, there was a chance that his granddaughter would be lowered to common status, Marquis Ackroyd made it so Lady Margaret and I would be registered as twins.

Lady Margaret alone would be raised like a noble to show she was capable, and that she should be the heir. And that was why I was raised to be a failure, treated like a maid, not allowed to go to school,

or be taught anything about noble life...

By the way, apparently Lady Medisina had loved us both at the beginning. She had heard about the false records in the Noble Registry, but didn't care. But when she learned that Father was to make me the heir... She thought that he was choosing his late first wife over her. She wouldn't accept that it was only because I was the eldest. After that, I was neglected and treated as Marquis Ackroyd ordered. Father had tried to stop Lady Medisina, but he was forced into confinement at the Marquis' estate as "work," and was seldom allowed to return home.

Once Father finished speaking, Lady Medisina shrieked from beside him, "It wasn't my fault!"

"It's true, you had no involvement in the falsified records." His Majesty the King agreed.

She broke out into a smile. "His Majesty agrees! It's not my fault!"

"But, you knew that they were not twins. Could you not have reported it?"

"Eh, ah, but I..."

"Though you knew, you did nothing. And on top of that, you abused Chelsea."

"No, I didn't! I disciplined her! And shouldn't a parent be allowed to treat their own child as they wish!?" Screaming with bloodshot eyes, Lady Medisina started lashing out. Knights immediately moved in to hold her down.

"Due to your 'wishes,' Chelsea was covered in wounds, and had various status ailments, such as inhibited growth. You should be ashamed to call yourself a parent," Lord Glen stood up and said. Lord Tris looked angry as well from his seat beside him.

"N-No... I-I... I...!" Hearing Lord Glen's words must have agitated her, because she began screeching unintelligibly. It was so loud and annoying that His Majesty ordered the knights to restrain her and take her outside.

Once she was gone, the room was silent. But the one to break that silence was the King.

"Marquis Ackroyd. Do you think that Chronowize's institutions have such a problem that they'd allow someone as low as a Baron to easily falsify records?" His Majesty smiled proudly at the Marquis, as if he already knew everything. Marquis Ackroyd stayed silent, beads of cold sweat running down his face.

"If you say yes, that the problem lies with our country, we'd need to start a large-scale investigation. If you're innocent, then there's nothing for you to worry about." The King's smile deepened. "But if you say no, then it means that someone would have had to have helped them. And the only highly ranked noble that the Eucharis

Barony is familiar with is you, Marquis.”

Marquis Ackroyd looked away, not saying anything at all. With a wave of his hand, His Majesty summoned knights, who surrounded and restrained the Marquis.

“W-What are you doing! Unhand me!!” The knights ignored him, dragging him into the square box. “I’ve done nothing!”

Even as he was being manhandled, Marquis Ackroyd’s pride didn’t falter.

“We have reports from the personnel who did the physical editing of the Noble Registry that Baron Eucharis was accommodating for Marquis Ackroyd’s interests as he gave the false report,” the Prime Minister said, before naming all of the people involved with the fraudulent reporting. “Each of the staff involved all reported various threats from the Marquis.”

“I have no recollection of that,” Marquis Ackroyd denied, but his wife raised her hand for permission to speak, and all eyes moved to her.

“I do not care about either you, who married into my family, or your daughter. What is important to me is the Ackroyd family’s continued nobility. Stop acting so shamefully.” The Marchioness could only speak up due to being the one related to the family by blood. “I have a request, Your Majesty.”

“You may speak.”

“My husband and I will take responsibility for the falsified records. But please, I beg of you not to punish the house of Ackroyd,” Marquis Ackroyd’s wife said, bowing deeply.

“That will all depend on your husband’s injustices. If your son has no connections to any of the crimes, I will consider naming him as the new Marquis.”

The Marchioness bowed deeply again, thanking him.

After the verdict was read, punishments were doled out. Father, due to the falsified records and his hand in the Marquis’ crimes, was to be sent to work hard labor in the mines for the rest of his life. The Eucharis Barony was dissolved. Lady Medisina didn’t recover from her hysteria, so she was fitted with a mana sealing bracelet and sent to a convent. My sister Lady Margaret, due to her magic going berserk, was expelled from the control training program, fitted with a proper mana sealing bracelet, and would be sent to an orphanage.

Marquis Ackroyd’s other offenses made his falsifying records seem like nothing, and he was to be held in the dungeons until all investigations would be finished. Once they were, he’d be hanged... Because his son did actually have a hand in his crimes, the Ackroyd family’s rank would change from Marquis to Earl. Though the

Marchioness had absolutely no hand in anything, due to her statement that she would accept punishment alongside the Marquis, she was to spend the rest of her life living in their territory. Also, all of the personnel who were involved in the falsified records would be fired.

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That night, I laid in bed thinking back over everything that happened that afternoon.

I'd stood up and refused Lady Medisina for the first time. And even though she went to hit me, Father stopped her. Father had taken part in the crimes despite knowing what they were in order to take care of our family. He had looked positively at his punishment, saying that since his mana hadn't been sealed, he'd use his [Earth Magic] Skill to its fullest as he made up for his crimes at the mines.

It seemed that I'd always had the wrong idea about my father. He wasn't a scary person, but a gentle one. If I ever had the chance to speak with him again, I'd ask him what kind of person my mother was. Though I was sure that her brother, the Margrave... My adopted father would tell me about her, but I wanted to know what my birth father thought of her.

As these thoughts circled around my mind, I drifted off to sleep.

Epilogue

I had the next day off. Lord Glen had told me to take it easy in my room, but unfortunately, that was impossible. Since it had been announced publicly that I'd become a national research fellow, and was adopted into the Sargent Margraviate, I'd been stuck under a deluge of letters and messengers. Most of the people just wanted to meet me, at least once. *What should I do?* Since I didn't know, I left it all to Gina and Martha. Gina chased away the messengers, while Martha quickly sorted through the letters. I was so glad they were there for me. After a while of this, Martha suddenly stopped completely.

"Lady Chelsea, you should read this letter," she told me, handing me one from Margravine Sargent... My new adopted mother.

Opening it, I saw that it was an invitation for tea today, since she'd be leaving the capital tomorrow. Though we'd met, we hadn't had a chance to talk properly yet. If she was leaving tomorrow, I wouldn't have another chance to see her for a long while.

"I'd like to have tea with Mother."

"Let's get you ready, then," Gina replied to my murmur with a smile.

At the third bell in the afternoon, I went to visit the Margravine in the guest house she was staying at. Inside, both Mother and Brother Marx were waiting for me.

"Thank you very much for inviting me."

"I'm so sorry for calling for you so suddenly," my adoptive mother said with an apologetic smile. "My husband was actually the first to think of inviting you over to see, but he was called away suddenly."

"Mother, I think it would be best to sit before starting to chat..."

"That's right! We've got some delicious sweets here!" she said, taking my hand to lead me to a seat near the balcony. The seat prepared for me had a cushion on it, and the table itself was laden with tea and pound cake filled with dried fruit. The room that my adoptive parents were staying in was to the west side of the royal palace, and you could see the five-story Research Institute and the Spirit Tree from the window.

"Fufu, it's not often you get to see such a big Spirit Tree," giggled Mother when she noticed me paying more attention to it than the sweets. The tree swayed, as if it had heard her. I could just imagine

Ele reclining arrogantly in his kitten form.

"I invited you over today because I wanted to hear about how you usually spend your days."

"How I usually spend my days...?"

"Yes, like what you do every day at the Research Institute!"

Mother's eyes were sparkling as she replied.

"In the mornings, I have a tea party with Lord Glen to increase my mana pool," I answered, thinking about what I usually do in a day.

Mother suddenly froze. *Oh, that's right. Since it's only recently been discovered that eating yummy food increases your mana pool, she must not know.* I explained it to her, and got a head tilt in response.

"I'm surprised to learn that eating delicious food has anything to do with your mana pool... But just moving away from that for a second, by 'Lord Glen,' you mean His Highness Prince Glenarnold, correct?"

"Yes. I didn't know until just a bit ago, but Lord Glen is the King's younger brother."

She nodded when I explained. Smiled brightly again, she asked, "And what do you do in the afternoons?"

"In the afternoon, I create different seeds with Lord Glen and Lord Tris."

Mother froze again. "W-Wait just a second, please," she said, putting a hand to her mouth as if she was thinking.

"Mother... The 'Lord Tris' Chelsea speaks of is Tristano Forium, the son of Marquis Forium who has three Skills," Brother added, only for Mother's eyes to widen in shock.

"Lord Tris is the son of a Marquis!? I didn't know that..." I was similarly shocked. With his usual demeanor, I never would have guessed!

"So you're surrounded by many different people, hm? And what do you mean by creating seeds?"

"My Skill is being able to make whatever seed I wish for, so we test to see what I can create. Since I was able to make seeds I'd seen and ones I saw in books, I made a Spirit Tree seed to see if I could make any phantasmic seeds..."

"Waaait! Please, wait!" Mother stopped me, using a louder voice than last time. When I tilted my head in confusion, I saw Brother give me a small shake of the head as he broke out into a cold sweat. *Oh, was I not supposed to mention the Spirit Tree thing to anyone?*

Coughing lightly to clear her throat, Mother looked closely at me. "...Do you mean that you were the one to plant such a big, imposing Spirit Tree?"

I could hear the Spirit Tree shaking in the distance.

"T-That's a secret!" I said, putting a finger to my lips.

Mother blinked a few times before breaking into a smile. “I haven’t seen that gesture in a while. You looked just like your mother, Sophia.”

I froze up for a moment hearing that. After a few seconds, I asked, “What kind of person was my Mother?”

“I shouldn’t be the one telling you...” she mumbled.

She’s someone you can’t talk about!?

“You should ask your grandparents about Sophia.”

“I see...”

Seeing my disappointment, Mother broke out into another grin. “Which means you need to come to the Margraviate with us!”

“Eh?”

“Now that that’s been decided, Marx! Make arrangements!”

Brother gave a huge sigh at Mother’s orders. “It would be impossible for her to leave tomorrow... But I’ll put the request in.”

“I guess there’s no helping that. But your capable big brother will manage somehow, so look forward to it, Chelsea!”

“O-Okay!” I said, falling right into her momentum.

+ + +

With all the might of a storm, my adoptive parents returned to the Sargent Margraviate. The Margraviate was on the border between our neighboring countries and the demonic forest in the middle of the continent. It took ten days to reach it by carriage. Because the demonic forest was famous for the monsters that overflowed from it, strong people in the Margraviate couldn’t leave it for long.

“I’d like to go there someday,” I told Lord Glen during one of our mana pool-growing tea parties, and got a gentle smile in response.

“You’ll probably... No, definitely, be going there soon.”

“Huh? Really?”

“It seems that miasma is leaking in from the neighboring countries. The only ones who can purify the miasma are Spirits, and only their contractors could utilize their power. Right now, you’re the only person contracted to a spirit.”

“I see...” I murmured, looking at the proof of my contract with Ele on my thumbnail as I nodded.

“I really don’t want to bring you that close to the demonic forest, though,” Lord Glen said, draining his teacup and setting it onto the table with a frown.

“If my going will mean that Ele can clear away the miasma, I’ll happily go. And the Sargent Margraviate is going to be my second home, so...!”

He gave me a surprised look hearing me reply so strongly, but soon went back to his usual soft, angelic smile. “You’ve changed a lot,

Chelsea.”

“Really?” I knew I’d changed a bit, but had I really changed ‘a lot?’ When I tilted my head in thought, Lord Glen gave me a strong nod.

“The first time I saw you was back in the garden at the Eucharis manor.” Back at home, I’d been desperately doing as I was told to avoid getting whipped. “When I peeked inside the garden before we entered, I saw a little girl doing her best to weed the lawn. You were horribly thin, draped in rags, and your hair was cut into different lengths. I knew you had to have been abused.”

“Huh!?”

I thought he’d been talking about when he came out after Appraising Lady Margaret’s Skill, but I was wrong.

“I’d only gone along that day because the Appraiser that was scheduled to go was sick, but I’m so glad that I did.” He stood up, moving to the chair beside me. “You were terrified when I actually went to Appraise you.”

Back then, I’d been hiding in the bushes, only for Lord Glen to try to coax me out. But because I’d been told that I wasn’t to be seen by guests because it would dirty their eyes, I knew that I’d get an even worse whipping than usual, so I didn’t move. *That’s right. I’ve always been terrified...*

“But now you know that you don’t have anything to fear at the Royal Research Institute.”

“Yes. I was shocked to find out that no one would whip or hit me for mistakes like Lady Medisina always did.”

When I’d first bowed to Lord Tris, all he’d done was chide me for bowing as a noble girl. He didn’t hit me. When I’d woken up before dawn and tried to clean, Martha had worried and told me to go back to sleep. She didn’t get angry, even though it would have been a problem for her and Gina as my personal maids not to wake up before me.

“And you speak your mind now, too,” Lord Glen said, giving me a smile even gentler than usual.

I couldn’t remember when I started, but I’d stopped just wordlessly nodding and started speaking for myself. No one got angry at me for speaking. Far from that, they all listened to me, and even smiled.

“You’ve become more expressive, too, smiling when you’re happy or having fun.” He patted my head softly.

I’d never been allowed to smile back at home. I realized now that what I was taught was “discipline” was something very warped and wrong...

“It’s true... I’ve changed more than I realized,” I replied, nodding

to him and giving my own gentle smile. It might have been a bit stiff since I wasn't used to doing it, but I hoped I was smiling like he always did.

As I thought that, he froze, and covered his face with his hand. I could see that his ears were red.

"The ones who changed me were you, Lord Tris, Brother, Martha and Gina, and everyone else... It's because everyone was nice, and treasured me. Thank you so much."

At my words, the Spirit Tree sparkled, and Ele appeared in the lab in his kitten form.

«Aren't you forgetting about me?» he said sulkily, ears turned back as he walked up to my feet.

"I haven't forgotten about you. You soothe me," I smiled, getting down from my chair to lift him up, and moving to the couch.

"...That smile isn't fair." I heard Lord Glen mumble something, and Martha nodded from her spot by the wall.

"Is something wrong?" I asked, tilting my head.

Still hiding his face, he cleared his throat and replied, "No, I was just thinking how modest you were."

He walked over, sitting in his usual spot beside me on the sofa.

"I think I'm going to change even more." I stroked Kitten Ele in my lap. His soft, fluffy fur felt nice.

"...And I'll watch you do it."

"Thank you. Please do!"

With that, we both smiled.



Side Story

1. Inn Experience

A while after my new Mother and Father had returned to the Sargent Margraviate, it was decided that Lord Glen and I would take a two-night, three-day trip to a hot spring town named Zankalt, which was a half day's carriage ride from the capital.

Earlier, during one of our tea parties, he mentioned that there was a chance I'd need to go to the Sargent Margraviate with Ele. And because it was ten days away by carriage, I and the knights guarding me would have to stop and stay in various inns on the way. I'd ridden in a carriage before, but I'd never stayed at an inn. When I'd asked Lord Glen if there were any special traveling manners I needed to know, he said... "Then let's get you some inn experience before you have to go on any long trips."

Before I knew it, the trip had been finalized.

+ + +

"I really, *really* want to go with you, but I can't leave the fields to anyone else..." Lord Tris grumbled, having come to see us off.

"We'll bring you back a souvenir," answered Lord Glen.

A souvenir? I think that's why Marquis Ackroyd used to bring home accessories for Lady Margaret. "Are you going to buy Lord Tris an accessory or something?" I asked, only to get a surprised look back from both men.

"What you're thinking of is a present for when someone visits someone else. What we'd be getting for Tris is something specific to the place we're going as a gift."

I nodded to Lord Glen's explanation.

"I want Miss Chelsea to pick the souvenir out," Lord Tris said with a smile.

"Huh?"

Lord Glen followed up, "Yeah, that'd be a good experience for her."

"I'm looking forward to it!"

As I stood shocked, they decided between each other that I'd pick out a gift to bring back.

"It's my first time, so I don't know if I can pick the right thing, but

I'll try," I said.

«I still cannot leave the Spirit Tree. Make sure to protect Lady Chelsea, no matter the cost.» Kitten Ele looked up at Lord Glen from at his feet, mewling. Lord Glen put a hand to his mouth and nodded. *Did he understand what he was saying?* I thought.

He called out to me while I was wondering, "We should get going soon."

"Alright. See you, Lord Tris, Ele." With my farewells, we boarded the carriage and left the Research Institute.

Our trip included Lord Glen and me, both Gina and Martha, two of Lord Glen's attendants/coachmen, and four knights to guard us, making ten people total. Two of the knights were women. All of the guard knights that I'd seen so far in the lodging house had been men.

"Why are two of the knights women?" I asked Lord Glen, a bit confused, and got a gentle smile back.

"There are some places that only women can enter," he said, patting me on the head.

I didn't see how guard knights and places that only women could enter could be connected, so I thought about it the whole way to Zankalt. But unfortunately, I didn't manage to think of an answer.

+ + +

We had a few breaks in between and arrived at Zankalt as the sun started dropping from its highest point.

"This is on the edge of Count Mogridge's territory. The hot springs bubble up from the mountain, and they pull the water to the town," Lord Glen explained, somewhat excitedly.

Looking out of the little carriage window, I saw streams of white smoke rising all over the town and asked, "Is the smoke from open-air fires?"

Back in the Eucharis manor, the old gardener used to gather the fallen leaves every autumn and burn them. The resulting smoke looked quite similar.

Lord Glen gave me a strange look before smiling and saying, "That's steam rising from the hot springs."

"Steam..."

I've seen steam rising out of hot water before. To think that the same kind of steam would be rising everywhere around me! I couldn't help but stare at the odd sight.

The carriage stopped in front of a slightly older looking manor in the middle of town. It was bigger than the Eucharis manor, and very fancy. Once we stepped outside, one of the guard knights walked over to the building's entrance and spoke with a man in fine clothes.

"Welcome!"

“We have a reservation for ten people...”

“Yes, I am aware. Please get your keys from the reception desk inside. I will have your carriage and horses brought to the stable next door.”

So this is the inn! I only realized once the man explained. There were double doors at the entrance, just like at the lodging house, and just inside was a counter with a pretty lady behind it. That must have been the reception desk, just like at the Institute.

While I was looking around, all of our luggage was carried inside. Then, people from the inn took the carriage and horses that the guards had been riding away to be stored. Lord Glen gently nudged me inside, and another one of the guards began speaking to the receptionist.

“Thank you very much for coming to our inn. Your reservation is for ten people, with three two-person rooms and two four-person rooms, making a total of five rooms. They’re all up on the third floor, where you will be the only guests. Meals will be in the dining room on the first floor. If you have any problems, please come straight to me. Here are your keys.”

Once the guard got the keys from the receptionist, we all walked up to the third floor. The farthest room in was for Martha, Gina, and I, while Lord Glen’s room was next door.

“So you’ll both be staying in the same room as me,” I murmured as we walked inside. Both Gina and Martha gave me apologetic looks.

“We are with you for your own safety, but if you dislike the idea, we can move to a different room.”

“Oh, I’m not unhappy about it at all. Actually, I’m really happy, since I’ve slept in a room by myself since I was little!”

The two maids’ looks changed to pitying ones after I said that.

“I’m happy to be in the same room with you as well, Lady Chelsea,” Gina said, showing a moment’s hesitation before hugging me tightly. “I know I shouldn’t be doing this, but...”

“Gina, that’s not fair! I’m gonna do it too... Excuse me!” Martha cried, hugging me from behind.



I smiled in their arms before there was a knock on the door. Both Gina and Martha stayed close, hiding me between them as they glared at the door.

“Come in.”

After I gave permission, Lord Glen poked his head in the room through the crack in the door, blinking once he saw what was happening. “I was going to ask if you wanted to explore the town, but...” He sounded sort of perplexed, unlike normal. He must have been surprised that my maids were hugging me.

I found it kind of fun, so I looked up at them. They both smiled, backing away and standing up in their proper maid way.

“We’ll stay here and unpack your things, so please, go and enjoy yourself with His Highness,” Martha said, smiling cheerfully as she pushed me towards Lord Glen.

He had a look on his face as if he wasn’t sure what to say, but quickly switched to his normal gentle smile as he patted me on the head. “Let’s get going.”

“Okay.”

Walking downstairs, my eyes met with the receptionist lady’s.

“Are you going out?”

“Yes, we’re going to explore the town. We’ll be back before dinner.”

“Alright. Please be careful,” the receptionist lady smiled sweetly, giving us a little bow.

We left the inn, and Lord Glen stopped. “If you tell the innkeeper when you’ll be back before you leave, they’ll come looking for you if you end up being late. In your case, there’s a chance that someone might carry you off while you walk around town, so make sure to always do it.”

“O-Okay.” I’d never thought that I might be kidnapped, since the guard knights were with us, too.

“And we might get separated in the crowd, so let’s hold hands,” he said, offering me his left hand. I took it with my right, and he gave it a little squeeze. He looked like he was having more fun than usual as we started walking. He might have been looking forward to this trip. The thought made me smile.

+ + +

A little bit after we left the inn at the foot of the mountain, we walked onto a bustling street full of people.

“It’s really lively here,” I murmured.

Lord Glen nodded. “This is a walking-only street, so it’s especially crowded.”

“Have you been here before, Lord Glen?” I asked, tilting my head. He’d been walking without a hint of hesitation since we left the inn.

“Once, when I was about your age,” he said with a nod. “There are food shops ahead, so let’s get something to eat.”

“Okay.”

Walking with him as he pulled my hand, I saw a sign saying “Onsen Meat Buns.” In front of the store was a round well-like object surrounded by stone, with a big wooden box on top. On top of the box was a wooden cover, and white steam was puffing out of the crack between the two.

“Welcome! How’d you like to try some onsen meat buns? They’re steamed with steam from the hot springs!”

Seeing that I was looking, the shopkeeper lifted the lid a tiny bit to show me what was inside. I could see a bunch of round white blobs bigger than the palm of my hand.

“We’ll take one,” Lord Glen said, handing money to the shopkeeper in exchange for a meat bun. He split it in half and handed one side to me. Inside, it looked like something similar to hamburger meat. “It’s okay if you don’t finish it, but try eating it just like that.”

He blew on the meat bun a few times before biting into it. *Does that mean I don’t have to practice proper noble manners with it?* Still wondering, I bit into the steaming bun. The white part on the outside was softer than bread, and doughy, and took on the flavor of the juicy meat inside. It was delicious! I managed to eat half before I was full.

“You’re able to eat more now, huh?” Lord Glen said, popping the rest of my half of the bun into his mouth.

As we walked even further, I saw a sign saying “Onsen Flan.” *It says “Onsen” too, but could it be the same flan that I love?* I didn’t think my favorite dessert would be here at the hot springs!

While I stood there, surprised, Lord Glen gave me a soft smile. “Do you want to eat that too?”

I’m still full from the onsen meat bun... Dejected, I shook my head.

“Let’s come back tomorrow, then,” he offered, patting me on the head.

“...Okay.”

After that, we walked around, seeing more foods labeled as “onsen,” carved wooden dolls that didn’t seem to have much of a link to the hot springs, strangely shaped rocks, and other things, before heading back to the inn.

+ + +

It was decided that we’d have a bath in the hot springs before dinner, so Martha, Gina, the two female knights, and I headed to the building behind the inn. Inside, there was a rest space lined with

chairs, and separate entrances for men and women. We went through the “women’s” door to the left. Gina, Martha, and I got undressed, heading to the washing place as one of the knights stayed behind to watch our things. After getting scrubbed down in the washing place, we dipped ourselves in the hot springs. The water was slightly green, and just a tiny bit slimy. It was really strange.

The other knight stood near the spring, still wearing her uniform. *Oh... The baths are split into men’s and women’s, so there really are some places that only women could go. That’s why we have female guard knights, too!* I finally understood what Lord Glen had been talking about in the carriage on the way here.

“Some inns don’t have baths. In those cases, you ask for a bucket of water and use a towel to wipe both your face and body,” Gina explained as we lounged in the spring.

After we got out, we ate dinner in the dining hall on the first floor. We’d had it explained to the staff that I couldn’t eat very much, but the table was still full of food. First, my maids and Lord Glen’s attendants ate a bit of each plate, and once they finished, Lord Glen and I were allowed to eat. When I asked later, it turned out that they were tasting it for poison. I was surprised, but Lord Glen told me that he appraised it, and it was all fine. Apparently, that was a thing to worry about when you traveled. I also learned for the first time that back at the Institute, everything was checked by a lower-level appraiser before it went out, so it was normally fine.

Since I’d eaten the onsen meat bun earlier, I couldn’t eat much at all. But I did manage to squeeze down the onsen flan they brought for dessert. It was different from normal flan in that it was slightly harder, but it was still delicious!

Once we’d finished eating, we moved to Lord Glen’s room to discuss our plans for tomorrow. It was decided that we’d all be going to the morning market to look around before heading to a nearby lake. Apparently, it was said that the lake sparkled like a rainbow which made me really excited! I slept well that night.

+ + +

The next morning, we left for the market right after getting up, and without eating breakfast.

The side of the street had stacks of wooden boxes, and on top of them were lots of different items for sale. There were vegetables I’d never seen before, good-smelling fruit, linked sausages...and in between those were things like meat skewers, fruit juice, and baked sweets.

While I was looking around, Lord Glen took my hand, saying, “You look like you’re about to go off and get lost, so we’ll hold hands

again.”

“Okay. Thank you.” His hand was warm, and it made me feel safe.

We bought some sandwiches we saw on the way before heading to the lake. There, we ate. My eyes widened at the fluffy, sweet egg inside them.

Once we finished, we walked around the lake. The water reflected the blue sky, so we didn’t see any rainbows.

“They might say it because it’ll reflect the sunset later in the day,” Lord Glen told me, giving me a soft smile.

It was at that moment that we heard a loud bang from one of the mountains nearby. It looked as if trees were disappearing from the mountainside.

“I can’t appraise it at this distance... Let’s go back to town to see what’s happening.”

Everyone nodded at his words, and we quickly went back to town. At the entrance stood a guard, not looking terribly interested.

“What was that sound?” Lord Glen asked the guard.

“There are sometimes small-scale landslides around here.”

Landslides happened when it rained a lot at once, or for long. The old gardener told me that.

“But there haven’t been any long or heavy rains here.”

“The landslides here aren’t caused by rain. Investigators said that they’re caused by bugs called bark beetles. It happens all the time, so don’t worry about it,” the guard said, smiling. Lord Glen kept staring at the mountain silently, as if he was thinking about something.

“It’s still bothering me, so I’m going to head to the town hall. Chelsea, go back inside with your maids and wait,” he told me once we reached the inn, before turning back the way we came with the knights in tow.

“Lady Chelsea, let’s get back to our room.”

I nodded to Gina’s suggestion, and we headed back upstairs. *Something bad might be happening.* While I thought that, I didn’t dare say anything, in case it made something bad actually happen.

+ + +

Lord Glen came back to the inn at sunset. His boots were caked in mud, and he looked tired. That night, we gathered back in his room, and he told me what happened.

“We went down to the town hall and checked the results of the investigation that Count Mogridge had done. The guard was right that they had said that the cause was bark beetles,” he explained, pulling out an insect encyclopedia from somewhere and opening it to their page. It said that bark beetles ate tree roots. They were smaller than my thumbnail. “But just as it says here, bark beetles aren’t that big.

There haven't been reports of any swarms big enough to cause a landslide. We'd picked this location because it was safe..."

Lord Glen was the King's younger brother, so he was in a position to hear reports from different regions. But since he hadn't heard anything...

"Does that mean that the investigation was inadequate?" I asked, getting a strong nod back.

"That's what it looked like, so the knights and I went to the scene of the landslide to check ourselves."

So that was why his boots were all muddy.

"My appraisal showed that the cause wasn't bark beetles, but monsters called root-eating rats."

"Monsters...!?" I blinked, shocked. The old gardener had told me that monsters were horrible things that attacked humans. I'd never seen one before myself, but to think that I was this close to some...

"We exterminated all of the root-eating rats, so there shouldn't be any more landslides." When I breathed a sigh of relief, he smiled at me. "Since we didn't get a chance to have any fun today, I'm thinking about extending the trip by a day. How about it?"

"Really? That would be wonderful!"

It was true that the landslide had put a damper on our plans, so I really was happy. After that, just like the day before, my maids and I bathed in the hot springs, we ate dinner together, and I slept well.

Interlude: Glen

The next morning at dawn, I felt something abnormal that woke me up. It felt like the air was vibrating, and anyone who'd ever faced a large monster would know it.

I quickly got dressed, putting the sword that had been by my bed on my hip. Looking through the crack in the curtains, the cause of the abnormal feeling was flying in the dawn sky. Straining my eyes, I used my [Appraisal] Skill.

[Gryphon (Unique)] was the only part I could read at that distance. The gryphon was the same color as the sky, and was steadily dropping in altitude as it flew towards the mountain that was the source of the springs. It was headed towards the empty spot where the root-eating rats had eaten through the tree roots and caused landslides.

Leaving my inn room, I gave orders to the guard knights keeping watch. "Gather all the knights in the area. The female knights need to stay here and keep protecting Chelsea."

The knights in front of my door nodded before running out of the inn, while the female knights in front of Chelsea's door lifted an arm to their chests to give me a knight's salute.

Stepping outside, I saw various disguised knights appear. We actually had many knights come along for the trip in secret. Chelsea was a research fellow for the kingdom, and contracted to Ele, the King of Spirits. She was incredibly important to the country, so we'd sent extra knights along just in case. *If there's this many, then we should be able to avoid any harm to the town.*

I looked over the disguised knights. "A Unique Gryphon has appeared. It's headed to the spot where the landslide occurred. We're leaving immediately to defeat it."

They all nodded at my orders.

With the knights, I headed towards the mountain that was the source of the springs. Since we'd gone the same way the day before, we were able to get there without getting lost. Following the mountain paths, we hid ourselves in the forest around the area where the landslide had occurred.

After a short wait, the gryphon arrived, having flown around the mountain's peak first. To put it in words from my previous life, it was as big as a trailer. Since I was close now, I appraised the gryphon again.

[Gryphon (Unique): A monster with the upper half and wings of an eagle and lower half of a lion. Has the power to enslave other

monsters, and change the colors of its own body. Weak to cold.]

The gryphon seemed to have noticed us, roaring a threat. I could hear it saying “You must be the ones who killed my root-eating rats!”

Having been reincarnated, I was able to understand any language, including the voices of monsters. Adding what it said and my appraisal together, I knew that this gryphon had sent the root-eating rats to eat the tree roots here to cause a landslide.

Exchanging looks with the knights around me, I raised my hand and cried, “Its weakness is cold! Go!”

At my signal, the knights attacked. One used [Earth Magic] to create a golem, while another shot at it with a bow. It seemed that no one within the group had the [Ice Magic] Skill.

The gryphon used its feet and wings to sweep away the arrows and dodge the golem. It was then that a bunch of sword-wielding knights attacked all at once. The gryphon was unable to dodge, and screeched loudly as it was wounded.

“I don’t need you lot getting in the way of my new roost! Begone!” the gryphon cried, spreading its wings and moving to fly away to regain its position.

“...Like I’d let you. *Barrier*,” I muttered, using magic of a different system than my Skills.

Barrier protected the things within its imagined range from all attacks and stopped the things inside from leaving it. That was why I used it on the stretch of land we were standing on. The range I had imagined was wide but short. As the gryphon flew up, it hit the invisible wall and dropped back down to the ground. Then, the knights all attacked.

“... *Freeze*.” I used magic to freeze the insides of its body from the blood coming out of its wounds. Because of the size of the monster, the amount of mana I used was huge, and I ended up light-headed.

The gryphon struggled, but gradually started slowing before suddenly stopping completely. I used my [Appraisal] Skill, confirming its death. All the knights cheered when I announced it.

2. Relief

The next morning, I woke up to the shrill cry of a bird. I hadn't heard any screeches as big as this before. It also seemed like there was a commotion outside. *What's happening?*

As I got up, wondering, Gina and Martha both had dark looks on their faces.

"Good morning. Did something happen?"

"...A monster has appeared."

My jaw dropped in shock at Martha's words. Lord Glen said he'd defeated monsters called root-eating rats the day before. It might have been connected to that.

While I was still surprised, Gina and Martha got me dressed.

"Please stay calm as you hear this," Gina started, before explaining what was happening currently. She told me that a huge monster with the head and wings of a bird had appeared and flown down to the side of the mountain that was the source of the springs. She also told me that Lord Glen had led the knights off to slay it.

"...Will Lord Glen be okay?"

Gina opened her mouth a few times, but stayed silent. One of the female guard knights spoke up from her place by the door. "His Highness is very strong, so he'll definitely return unharmed."

I nodded. The only thing I could do was believe in what she said.

After that, we went down to the dining room on the first floor for breakfast. For some reason, there weren't any other guests there. The other guests had all been rich-looking older merchants, so they might have evacuated when they heard that there was a monster.

In front of me on the table were soft bread, green soup, scrambled eggs, and bacon. It all looked so good, but for some reason, I couldn't make myself eat... I ended up not touching anything in the end.

Once we returned to my room, I sat down on the sofa. *Lord Glen is probably fighting the monster right now. He has both the [Appraisal] and [Cure] Skills, so he shouldn't be injured that easily. The knight had said that he was really strong, so he must be okay...* But I didn't know what would happen if it was a really strong monster. Just the thought brought all the worry back up again. Was there anything I could do?

"What should I do at a time like this?" I asked, only to get a troubled look from Gina.

"I'm sorry. I've never experienced this before myself... All I can think of is to pray."

The prayer you said before eating was to the earth god, thanking them for what you were about to eat. That was what the old gardener

told me.

“Should I pray to the earth god for Lord Glen to come back safely?”

“I think you can pray to any god you want, Lady Chelsea,” Martha said with a smile.

I started praying to the same earth god for Lord Glen to be alright. After praying for a while, it suddenly got even noisier outside. Martha peeked out the gap in the curtains, before looking at me with a happy smile, announcing, “His Highness is back!”

I couldn’t help but bolt out of the room. I ran down the stairs to the first floor, only to see Lord Glen, the guard knights, and all of the other merchant guests. Their clothes were ripped, and their boots covered in mud, but no one seemed to be badly injured.

Seeing them back safe, I felt the relief wash over me—my knees gave out, and I dropped to the floor. “Huh? ...What?”

Lord Glen rushed over to me. “Chelsea, are you alright?”

“Y-Yes...”

I managed to grab his hand, but I couldn’t gather the strength to stand. Then, he scooped me up. “You must be spent from all that stress. I’ll bring you back to your room.”

“I’m sorry. Thank you...” I replied, extremely apologetic, and he gave me his usual angelic smile in return.

I’m so glad he’s okay. Thank goodness his gentle smile came home. As I thought that, the words just slipped out naturally.

“...Welcome home.”

Lord Glen looked stunned for a second, before showing me a different, happy smile. “I’m home, Chelsea.”

+ + +

That day, our lunch turned into a victory celebration. As everyone held up their glasses, Lord Glen stood up from his spot across from me.

“Thanks to all of you, we were able to safely defeat the gryphon. I’m looking forward to your further work!”

All of the people started cheering and chomping down the thick steaks on the table. It turned out that all of the merchant guests had helped Lord Glen and the knights fight the monster.

“Liquor is best after a win!”

“Gryphon meat is great, it doesn’t smell at all!”

“I can’t believe we get to eat so much of this rare meat!”

I could hear all of the knights and merchants talking about the meal.

“The monster that we fought was called a gryphon, and it’s famous as a super high-quality ingredient,” Lord Glen explained to me

before biting into his own steak. "This is actually the first time I'm eating it, but it's really amazing... You try some too, Chelsea."

Taking his suggestion, I cut off a small bite-sized piece of steak and brought it to my mouth.

"...Nmmm!?"

Unlike normal meat, the umami spread as I ate it, and it melted in my mouth with a fizz. It wasn't just delicious, but also strange.

After the party, Lord Glen came back to my room with me.

"I have something I want you to do for me," he started, sitting across from me on the other sofa. "The gryphon we fought today was actually unique, and used the root-eating rats to make itself a den."

I blinked in shock. Root-eating rats ate tree roots, as per their name. Because of that, they caused landslides, opening up a spot on the mountainside. And a gryphon was trying to make that into a den...!

"If we leave it like it is, a second or even third gryphon could come for it." Since it was made for a gryphon to live in, that was possible. "That's why I'd like for you to make some tree seeds."

"You want to plant the seeds I make and cover the spot in trees again, like it was originally."

He nodded. "I thought that the fastest way to get it back to normal would be to ask you."

"Leave it to me!" I said resolutely.

After that, we discussed what kind of plant seeds to make. He pulled out another book on vegetation out of nowhere and flipped to the tree pages. From there, we chose a tree that wouldn't cause any problems if planted. If it was already a species that grew quickly, it would be easier to imagine, and thus easier to create.

"Thank you."

"Okay. I'll make some fast-growing oaks — [Seed Creation]," I whispered, and an oak seed...an acorn fell onto the table. After that, I kept making acorns until Lord Glen stopped me.

"You're going to end up running out of mana," he warned, and I realized the table in front of me was covered in little acorns. I must have gotten caught up in thinking I'd be a help... "This should be more than enough. Thank you."

He got up, giving my head a pat. Martha took out a cloth bag and collected all of the acorns.

"I'm off to the mountain again," Lord Glen said, taking the bag from her.

"...I'd like to go too," I mumbled under my breath, but Lord Glen still heard me. He looked surprised, but then gave me his usual soft smile.

"Let's all go together then, like we did when we went to the lake."

“Thank you!” I didn’t think he’d agree, so I was really happy.

But the mountain paths were harder on me than I had expected. Neither Gina nor Martha were sweating, and they seemed fine, so it probably wasn’t hard on normal people. I was breathing heavily as I walked, and both Lord Glen and the knights tried to offer to carry me, but I managed to hold them off. It took a long time, but we finally managed to reach the location of the landslide. *I really need to think about raising my endurance from now on!*

The spot that the root-eating rats had caused the landslide at had holes where the trees must have been growing, while the trunks rolled down the mountain. They really did only eat roots...

“It should probably be enough to toss an acorn into each of the holes,” Lord Glen said, handing out acorns. Then, we took turns tossing them. I mimicked them, tossing my acorn into a nearby hole.

After a while, trees started sprouting up from where the acorns had landed. Gina, Martha, and all of the knights looked on in shock, while Lord Glen and I smiled at each other.

“You’re all forbidden from speaking about what you saw with anyone else,” he ordered.

Everyone nodded, still surprised. My Skill must be a secret because it still hasn’t been fully researched. I felt kind of strange watching the oak trees grow bigger.

3. Souvenir

We'd been able to lengthen the trip by a day due to the landslide, but we couldn't stretch it out any further. The reason was that Lord Glen had caught the attention of all of the townspeople, and we couldn't relax anymore. The news that he was Prince Glenarnold, the King's younger brother, and that he'd defeated the gryphon, was spreading.

"It's probably because I revealed my identity at town hall when I went to check the investigation results," he told me with a sigh.

With that, it was decided that we'd return on our final day, which was today, after getting souvenirs for Lord Tris and Ele.

I headed towards a shop we'd found on our first day in Zankalt. On it was a sign saying "Make Onsen Eggs!"

"I want to bring home onsen eggs as a souvenir. Would that be okay?" I asked Lord Glen, who got surprisingly excited at the thought. He looked young, almost childish when I saw him like this. How old was he, anyway?

"That's a great idea. Let's do it," he said, walking straight inside the store.

"Hello~!" A well-built woman called out to us as we entered.

"We'd like to make some onsen eggs..." Lord Glen handed her the payment and got a basket full of eggs back.

"Behind the shop is a spot where we've pulled hot spring water from the source, so put the entire basket in the water. After you heat it for ten minutes, pull it out. The basket is included in the price, so you can take it with you afterwards."

"Alright."

We walked behind the store and stood in front of a pool of bubbling hot spring water.

"So we put the basket with the eggs in the water with this pole here, and then when time's up, we take it out. Which do you want to do?"

After thinking for a moment, I said, "...I'll put them in."

Lord Glen handed me the basket and pole with a soft smile.

I did as I was instructed, hanging the egg basket on the end of the pole and lowering it into the water. The pool turned out to be fairly shallow, so it quickly reached the bottom. After we made sure the eggs were okay, I took the pole out and put it back where we found it.

As we watched the eggs, Lord Glen started speaking. "A lot more happened on this trip than we planned."

"You're right. I was surprised that there was a landslide, and

monsters. But you'd never be able to experience something like that on-demand, so I think it was okay in the end."

He looked shocked for a moment, before patting me on the head. "You're gonna experience a lot of different things, and change a lot, too."

"It's thanks to you bringing me with you, Lord Glen." I gave him one of the smiles I'd become slightly used to giving, and he squinted as if he was seeing something bright, smiling back.

"Looks like it's done," he said a while later, using the pole to fish the basket out of the water. The eggs were steaming, so they must have been really hot.

Carrying the basket, we headed back towards the inn.

+ + +

We reached the entrance to the Royal Research Institute half a day after leaving the inn, just before the sun went down. And just as the day we left, Lord Tris and Ele in his kitten form were waiting for us.

"I was worried when I heard you stayed a day later than you planned and saw some monsters!" Lord Tris cried, scrunching his face up.

"I'm sorry for worrying you. This is your souvenir," I replied, handing him the basket of onsen eggs from Zankalt.

"Onsen eggs!? These are my favorite!" He took the basket, spinning around like he was dancing before he walked towards the Institute.

«Is there nothing for me?» Ele muttered in his kitten form as we watched Lord Tris go.

"Ah, I gave them all to Lord Tris..."

«What!? He's going to eat them all at this rate!» Ele cried, running off after him.

Lord Glen and I looked at each other and smiled.

Afterword

Hello to both new and old readers... It's me, Milli-gram.

Thank you so much for buying "I'll Never Step Foot in That House Again!" This story was originally published on the novel website "Syosetsu-ka ni Narou," but this version was heavily edited...or, more accurately, half-rewritten. It's fully loaded with new episodes, so the people who read the web novel can enjoy the changes.

Getting all the stiff(?) greetings out of the way... Lemme get real.

I actually got offers from a lot of companies to publish this series. Like, a lot. And out of them all, Overlap was the only company to offer something super juicy aside from my conditions. It was the launching of the female-oriented label, "Overlap Novels f"! And my story would be one of the launch titles... It was just amazing. I couldn't let such a great opportunity get away, so I agreed straight away, which led to this (lol).

Thank you so much for asking me, Editor Y-san!

Let me mention all of the people I want to thank...

The illustrator, Yuki Kana-sensei. When I saw the character designs, older Glen was so attractive and my type that I decided I'd definitely age him up in the story.

My editor, Y-san, the salespeople, proofreaders, designers, and everyone at the printing shops.

My two hamsters, my gerbil, plecostomus, tropical fish, and shrimp, who all healed my heart.

And finally, you, for buying my book.

Thank you all so much!

I hope that good things happen to everyone involved in making this all happen!

Milli-gram

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

Author Milli-gram

Illustrator Yuki Kana

1





Glenarnold

An Appraiser with Sage-level Skills.

Chelsea

A girl who awakened to the brand new Skill [Seed Creation].

Ele

The King of Spirits. Usually stays in kitten form.

Gina

Chelsea's personal maid. Likes cats.

Martha

Chelsea's personal maid. Likes vegetables.

Maryfort

Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights. Son of Margrave Sargent.

Fristano

A researcher assigned to help Chelsea. Can use three Skills.

“Now then, try it.”

I nodded, before
whispering,

“Make a seed—
[Seed Creation].”



Bonus Short Stories

Three Sisters

~A bit before Chelsea became a Research Fellow~

“Lady Chelsea, we’ve received your pay from the Royal Research Institute,” Gina said.

My jaw dropped. *Now that I think about it, Lord Tris told me I’d be getting paid when I first came here...*

“Would you like to go shopping?”

“Um... I’ve never gone shopping before.”

Back at the Eucharis manor, I’d never been allowed to step off of the grounds, much less go shopping. Hearing my response, both Gina and Martha looked upset.

“Well then, let’s go shopping soon. We’ll teach you all we can about how to use money and how things are priced.”

With that, it was decided that all three of us would go on my next day off. Since it was my first time, I asked Lord Glen during one of our mana pool tea parties for advice on if there was anything I had to look out for.

“You’ll probably have some knights going with you as guards, but...maybe you should wear a disguise.”

“A disguise? Why?”

“If you went out as a noble lady with maids and knights, it’d be easier for you to get caught up in some crime,” he explained, forcing a smile. “You should have your maids disguise themselves, too.”

I was shocked since I’d never considered that. With a nod, I replied, “Alright. Thank you.”

When I told Gina and Martha about Lord Glen’s advice, we ended up discussing possible disguises.

“Let’s come up with a story, first,” said Gina excitedly, far from her usual serious demeanor.

“Lady Chelsea could be the daughter of a merchant, with us as her maids...”

“That’s too close to reality. It wouldn’t be much of a disguise, then.” Gina immediately struck down Martha’s idea. “We’ve been told to dress up as well, so let’s think of another story.”

After a bit more back and forth, Martha suddenly had a flash of inspiration, “How about we go as three sisters?”

“...With me as the eldest, you as the middle, Marth, and Lady Chelsea as the far younger sister?”

“We could be the daughters of some merchant, showing our little sister how to shop!”

Both of them looked at each other and nodded in agreement. *If they were my older sisters...*

“I’ll call you Sister Gina and Sister Martha while we shop, then.” The moment I said that, they each held their hands together, touched. *Did I say something strange?*

After that, we acted the part of sisters and safely finished our first shopping trip. I was able to learn a fair bit about how to use money and the prices of things.

Once we returned to the lodging house, I changed into my usual dress while Gina and Martha put their maid uniforms back on. Up until that moment we’d been sisters, but now they were my maids again... A wave of loneliness came over me.

“I wish you two really were my older sisters...” I said, mumbling something I’d never usually say out loud.

They both gave me big smiles.

“I’m happy you think that way!”

“So am I...!”

Neither of them got cross or exasperated. Maybe they had fun becoming sisters, too?

“If we go shopping together again, could you be my sisters again?” I asked, thinking that, and they looked even happier, replying in unison. I wasn’t sure if I’d be allowed to go another time, but if, just if, *I could go...*

“Of course!” they replied in unison.

Thank You for Taking Care of Me

“Gina and Martha have been taking care of me ever since I came to the Royal Research Institute. I want to thank them. What do you think I should do?” I asked Lord Glen on the way back to my room from the Institute.

After pausing for a moment, he gave me his usual gentle smile. “I think they’d be happy if you just said thank you, but you want to show your appreciation in a way you can see, don’t you?”

“Yes!”

“Then why don’t you give them some kind of present?” he suggested, giving me an impish smile before taking me into town.

Our destination was a general store in the capital’s noble’s quarter. I’d come here with Gina and Martha before. It sold lots of things like accessories, cases, music boxes, stationery, and embroidery

supplies.

“Because of their jobs, maids don’t usually wear accessories.”

Now that I thought of it, neither of them ever wore necklaces, bracelets, or even rings. Maybe it was because they’d get in the way of their duties.

“I see. Then what should I give them...?”

Lord Glen smiled his gentle smile as I wondered. “They might like something like these, that won’t get in the way, and that they can use,” he said, pointing. The things he pointed out were all different: some with patterns, others in the shape of flowers, or with glass or stones in the middle.

“You’re right. These shouldn’t get in their way!”

I picked out a couple that had some precious stones that were nearly the color of my hair.

“I hope they like them...” I worried as they were being wrapped for me, and Lord Glen patted me on the head.

We returned to the lodging house afterwards with the gifts.

“I’m back.”

When I stepped in, Martha and Gina greeted me worriedly.

“We were getting worried because you were late,” said Martha, looking to Lord Glen, who was standing diagonally behind me.

Oh no, are they suspecting him of something...?! I quickly held out the wrapped presents, explaining, “I actually had Lord Glen take me out shopping. I wanted to thank you both for all you do... Please, take them.”

Though they were confused, they took the packages and opened them.

“These are...decorative buttons?”

“And the stones are the same color as your hair, Lady Chelsea!”

They seemed much more surprised than happy as they stared at them, unmoving. When I started to get worried, Lord Glenn patted me on the head.

“Giving your personal maids or attendants things that are the same color as your hair is a sign of trust.”

I’d given them without knowing that, but they did have my trust. I didn’t make a mistake in my item choices, but they might not have liked them... Just as I was starting to get sad, both of the maids gave me brilliant smiles.

“I’m so happy I can barely speak. Thank you so much for this wonderful button, Lady Chelsea!”

“I’m shocked that you would show that you trust us so definitely! I’m thrilled! Thank you very much!”

Both Gina and Martha are so happy! I’m glad I gave them presents!

Blueberry

At the same time I became a Research Fellow, I was given my own garden in the citadel. It was near the royal residences, within the barrier that kept anyone but royalty and those with permission from entering. Gardeners would take care of the plants every day, but I would have to decide what to grow there. They told me I could pick whatever plants I wanted, but since I got the garden because of my Skill to make any seed, I'd prefer to plant something I created.

What should I plant? When in doubt, ask Lord Glen for advice!

And so, I asked during one of our mana pool-growing tea parties.

"His Majesty suddenly decided to give you your own garden, so he probably wants to see some plants he wouldn't usually come across," he said, putting a hand to his chin as he thought. "Since we're already used to seeing beautiful flowers, why not go with fruit? You could add some traits like making them bigger or sweeter than normal when you make the seeds."

"That's a good idea. We could eat them as is, or make them into jam."

Using what Lord Glen and I had thought of and discussing things with the gardeners, I decided on growing blueberries.

"I'll make seeds for blueberries that are sweeter and one or two times bigger than normal berries — [Seed Creation]," I cast in front of the gardeners before tossing the seeds over the tilled garden. A moment later, buds started sprouting up. Their eyes were wide with shock.

"The seeds that Lady Chelsea creates are quite amazing..." one of them commented.

Another muttered, "I didn't expect for them to go to bud immediately..."

"Thank you for taking care of them until they produce fruit," I said. Since it would be the gardeners' job to care for the plants, I left it to them and headed back to the lodging house.

A month later, the blueberries had grown, so I went to the garden with Lord Glen to see.

The gardener explained nervously, "It takes one to two years to get any fruit from a bush normally, and not many either, but..."

Lord Glen and I were just entranced by the berries before our eyes.

"They're all pretty big..."

"...And there are a lot of them."

The blueberries themselves were as large as the circle you'd make with your index finger and thumb and grew in clusters.

"Let's try eating some."

"Alright."

We took one blueberry each and popped them into our mouths. The distinct blueberry flavor, sweetness with a bit of sourness, spread through our mouths. *They're much yummier than I imagined they'd be!*

"This is amazing... I didn't think they'd be this good," said Lord Glen, a look of surprise on his face.

"If they're this good, I want everyone to try them."

"You're right... Let's do that," he agreed, giving me his usual gentle smile.

And at my suggestion, we had everyone eat the big blueberries, His and Her Majesty included. I was shocked to later receive a personal message from the Queen telling me that she thought they were delicious and wanted to eat them again.

If they make people this happy, I want to grow more delicious fruit sometime...

Tris's Smile

~A while after Chelsea became a Research Fellow~

Marx, the second son of Margrave Sargent, and Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights, had gone to speak to Tris.

"Lord Tris... I have something I'd like to ask you," said Marx, giving the other man his trademark knightly grin.

Since he couldn't recall doing anything wrong, Tris looked at him blankly. "Yes?"

"How do you feel about my little sister Chelsea?"

Tris blinked in confusion. "Are you investigating something, or...?"

"No. I just thought I should check, as her older brother."

"I think of Miss Chelsea like a little sister," replied Tris, scratching his face.

Marx's face darkened. If Chelsea had another brother-like acquaintance, would that mean she wouldn't rely on him...?

Tris didn't notice this change at all, instead continuing to explain as he looked off into the distance, "When Miss Chelsea first came to the Institute, her hair was cut to all sorts of different lengths, and she was skin and bones. I thought she might break if she was touched."

Marx scowled. "Hair is part of her body. It's unforgivable for them to cut her hair like that..."

Tris smiled at Marx's muttering. "That's why I decided to smile."

Not understanding what the researcher was getting at, Marx tilted his head, confused.

"Miss Chelsea was always terrified that someone would be cross with her. I figured that she must've always been surrounded by angry

people. I thought that if I smiled and told her through my actions that I was different from them, she might stop being so scared.”

“I see.”

“I dunno if my smiling made any difference, but she did stop being so scared all the time. She even started smiling a bit!” Tris clenched his fists as he spoke. “I was so moved when I first saw her smile! I was just as happy as I had been when my niece first walked!”

Marx looked confused again. “And that’s why you think of her like a sister?”

“Yep. She’s gonna end up trying a lot of things. She might fail at some, but she’ll also have some successes! And I’ll be moved every single time...!” Tris shook his fists, smiling happily.

That’s when Marx thought, *Isn’t that more like a daughter than a sister?* But he didn’t say it. Whichever it was, it wouldn’t change the fact that he treasured her.

“I see. I understand your feelings completely. I hope you’ll continue to be her friend and fellow researcher.”

“Of course!”

Both of the men smiled, shaking hands.

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again! Volume 1
by Milli-gram

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Edited by Meiru

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